

Lee, MA

Open Space and Recreation Plan

June 2024



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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Lee Open Space and Recreation Committee Participants

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Various other Lee Town Boards and Commissions were consulted during the preparation of the plan.

Town of Lee Staff:

The staff of the Lee Town Hall and town departments provided essential technical and administrative assistance.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) served as the lead planning consultant for the project and produced this document.

Plan Summary

The *2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan* was developed with the protection of open space and provision of recreational opportunities as key ingredients of the quality of life in a community. Lee's open space areas and recreation programs and facilities contribute to its quality of life and should be accessible to all of Lee's residents. It also analyzes how well Lee is protecting these very important features. The OSRP's Seven-Year Action Plan sets a planning agenda for implementing strategies necessary to meet these goals. Some of the more important findings of this study are that:

1. Residents want to ensure that land use decisions balance quality of life, take into account social and economic needs, and improve the quality of the environment.
2. Townspeople would like to encourage development that utilizes existing infrastructure, encourages neighborhood character while discouraging sprawl, and enhances the pedestrian and bicycle network in the town.
3. Lee is changing in many ways: the sharp decline in manufacturing, concerns about PCB contamination in the Housatonic, and an aging population. Remediation of PCB contamination in the Housatonic River threatens scenic and fragile environmental areas in the town.
4. Recreational opportunities and open space contribute to community interaction and quality of life. Lee's strong sense of community remains an important defining characteristic.
5. The Town has an extensive inventory of protected open space including many acres under local, state, and federal ownership. During the summer of 2023 the town became an Appalachian Trail Community. Local conservation organizations like the Lee Land Trust, the Trustees of Reservations, and Berkshire Natural Resources Council maintain publicly accessible properties for passive recreation in the town. However, many important areas remain unprotected or in temporary protection (Chapter 61 lands). Agricultural lands, so important in defining Lee's character, are in danger of being converted to non-agricultural use. Promotion and utilization of long-term protective strategies such as the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR) and conservation easements, combined with voluntary actions supporting locally grown agricultural products, growth management and development standards could be effective ways to retain these lands. Lee recently used CPA funds to acquire 25 acres of open space land at 505 Stockbridge Road and, thereby, creating a contiguous parcel of town owned lands at the Longcope/Town Farm properties.

6. Lee is fortunate to have extensive outdoor recreation facilities for both active and passive recreation. Focusing on environmental education and linking protected town lands into an open space system are ways to ensure that the conservation attributes of the land are met while increasing the use and enjoyment by town residents.
7. Overall, the population is aging. Changing recreation needs for younger, older, and disabled residents should be addressed by the town. Creating a Lee Parks and Recreation Department and utilizing the Lee Youth Commission to oversee/coordinate parks activities throughout the town could enhance these efforts.
8. Lee should work to diversify offerings to meet the recreational needs of its population. Particular attention needs to be paid to the development of recreation programs for all age groups and to the maintenance of its facilities, including the provision of modern, safe equipment that is accessible to all people, especially those with disabilities.
9. Lee is pursuing an active economic development and re-development program. The Eagle Mill Redevelopment is one example of a project recently initiated in the town. Other former mills remain closed and underutilized. Economic development and re-development efforts must preserve sensitive environmental resources while utilizing town infrastructure and brownfield sites.
10. More development will occur on marginal lands as the town gets closer to buildout. This will bring many environmentally sensitive areas into jeopardy. Much of the Lee landscape is vulnerable because of its geology, soils, and topography.
11. Cooperative efforts will broaden existing and future resource offerings and assets. Partnering with non-profit and conservation organizations will help ensure this plan and other related efforts will be successfully implemented.

Continued monitoring of plan goals and objectives will provide a metric to judge the success of the plan and enable the next plan to be developed. The OSRP Committee should meet on an annual basis to monitor town progress on the objectives of the plan.

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The *2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan* mirrors Lee's intent to protect, preserve, and broaden its open space and recreational offerings. Building upon the extensive work completed during the Master Plan process, the plan provides a framework for balance between community needs and open space preservation over the next seven years. There is a strong feeling among many residents in the community that the economic well-being of the town and its residents is important and should be factored into any town decisions. At the same time, there is a very real concern on the part of many other residents that Lee is in danger of losing its quality of life that makes it a special place to live and to raise a family. Recreation and open space opportunities are important components of Lee's quality of life and, as evidenced by the results of a recent community survey, are two of the areas in need of improvement in the town. It is important to note that protecting wildlife habitat was another high priority listed in a public opinion survey conducted in March of 2023.

Thoughtful planning is critical as the town continues its transition from a manufacturing economy to a more service-based and tourist economy. The implementation of several planning initiatives has included renewed interest and work on updating the Lee Master Plan as well as the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Planning Process and Public Participation

Lee first conducted an open space planning process in 2000. A draft plan was substantially complete in 2000 but was never formally submitted for approval. Building partially upon the 2000 planning effort, the *Lee Open Space and Recreation Plan* was developed in 2015-16 by the Lee Open Space and Recreation Task Force (Task Force), led by the Lee Youth Commission with the help of many of the town departments such as the Conservation Commission. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission served as technical advisors to the Task Force gathering relevant data and preparing the planning documents both in 2016 and 2023. This document was subsequently used as the basis for the 2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan update for Lee.

The analysis to update the plan consisted of a review of current census data, an updated recreation and open space survey as part of the master planning process, and feedback from key stakeholders as well as other citizens. The open space questions (5-14 of survey) in the Master Plan survey were designed in coordination with the Open Space Committee and asked for resident preferences in preserving and conserving lands, preferred activities residents enjoy, parks needing improvement, as well as generalized

questions such as “why do you live in Lee” and demographic questions. The public survey, filled out by 448 residents as part of the combined OSRP/Master Planning process, provided detailed information on a variety of topics, including the open space and recreational needs of people of all ages in the community. The survey was advertised on the town website and using flyers posted around town at various business, Lee Library, Town Hall, and at the Council on Aging. The Open Space and Recreation plan was developed using the results of the survey. In addition to the internet, the survey was made available to the public through paper copies available at the Lee Town Hall, the Lee Library, and the Council on Aging. The survey results and a summary report can be found in Appendix X of this plan.

Based on existing and new information, the committee met eight times during the spring, summer, and fall of 2023, to discuss draft materials, to provide corrections and edits, and to develop goals and actions. On Saturday, October 21, in the Lee Middle and High School auditorium, the Committee invited the public to provide input on the draft goals and objectives, and comments received were incorporated into the plan.

The public forum was widely advertised with color flyers posted in public places such as the town hall, the local elementary and high schools, the post office, the senior center, and the library. Flyers were also posted in retail stores and restaurants throughout the town. Local stakeholder groups such as land trusts, and conservation organizations were directly notified of the forum and invited to participate.

The October public forum was attended by approximately 35 residents representing various neighborhoods and age groups. The forum began with a presentation that summarized the main findings of the plan and the results of the public survey. The presentation closed with a summary of the goals and a short background about how each goal was established. A question-and-answer period followed the presentation.

The draft plan, including maps and results of the town-wide survey, was posted on the town’s website for easy public access and review. On December 12, 2023 the Committee met to review the plan for final edits and comments prior to being offered once again to the public for review and comments. Each meeting was publicized in accordance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

A copy of the draft plan was posted on the town’s website, and a hard copy was placed at the front desk of the Lee Library and at the Town Clerk’s office. Figure 26 shows a screenshot of the advertisement of public comments on the plan. Public comments were incorporated into the final version of the plan.

Figure 1 Red Eft, Golden Hill Town Forest**Photo Credit: Linda Cysz**

Enhanced Outreach for Environmental Justice Neighborhood.

A portion of Lee west of the town center is considered by the Executive Office of Energy and the Environment as an Environmental Justice (EJ) Area (See Figure 19). The EJ designation for this area qualifies because the median household income for residents within this census block is less than or equal to 65.5% of the state average. As the state's average for 2023 was \$74,278, it means that the median household income for this area was \$55,144 or less. No other populations in the town meet the EJ criteria. The population within the EJ area is approximately 1,000 people, which is approximately 17% of the town's population.

The EJ area is bound on the west by Housatonic and Main Streets (Route 20), to the south by the Massachusetts Turnpike, to the west by Greylock Street and to the north by Center/Columbia Street. Residential development along the Main and Housatonic Streets is a mix of high density and multi-family housing units, while the rest of the area is predominantly a mix of medium- and low-density single-family homes (refer to EJ Map Figure 19 and Land Use Map, Figure 9). The Lee Athletic Field is within the EJ area with tennis, pickleball, basketball, skateboard, playground, pavilion and boat ramp. Land available to residents for outdoor recreation or quiet reflection within ½ mile of this block include the Ferncliff

Property, the Lee Public Schools, the adjacent Fairmount Cemetery, the River Park, the Lee Bank Baseball Fields, the Town Farm (aka Stockbridge Road Recreation Area), and St. Mary's Cemetery. The southern edge of the Golden Hill Town Forest is within ½ mile of this block, but public access on Golden Hill Road is a mile or more away. Greenock Country Club is also near the EJ area, and in the winter, it is used by local residents for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Park benches line Main Street and the town square within walking distance of senior and subsidized housing complexes. River Park, which covers 8.8 acres within the vicinity of 70 St. James Avenue, and the proposed Lee Bikeway are within the EJ boundaries and would increase outdoor recreation for not only these residents but also those within the densely developed neighborhoods outside of the EJ area.

Several steps were taken to enhance outreach to ensure visibility of this project and participation from the Town's EJ population. The OSRP committee meetings and public forums were held at Town Hall and at the Lee High School, both within the census block designated as an environmental justice community. The survey link was publicized through distribution in town water bills and postings at local businesses and public spaces (Library, Town Hall, Council on Aging, all within the EJ Community boundaries.) Hard copies of the survey and flyers that included a link for the online version of the survey were distributed throughout the downtown area. Other outreach sites included the Crossway Village, an affordable senior housing complex located within the former Lee Central School building (In the heart of the EJ Community.) Additionally, membership of the steering committee included volunteers that regularly serve the town's EJ population, and their roles associated with this project are shaped by those experiences.

Community Setting

Regional Context

With its location on the Massachusetts Turnpike and in the middle of Berkshire County, Lee is the "Gateway to the Berkshires". The geographic center of Berkshire County is only one mile from the center of town. The town is nestled in the Housatonic River Valley with hills to the east, south and west. These mountain-side slopes are the largest single physical element affecting the future development of Lee. Approximately 6,500 acres (37% of the total land area) can be considered steep grade (15% or greater). Located immediately off Exit 10 of the Massachusetts Turnpike, Lee is often the first Berkshire destination of commercial travelers and tourists from the south, east, and west.

The landscape of Lee is dominated by two distinct forms of landforms. Dominating the town to the east is the hilly Berkshire Hills Plateau, encompassing October Mountain and shared with neighboring Becket and Washington, which is one of Lee's most scenic vistas. The mountain, with some of the highest elevations in the town, rises to nearly 2,000 feet, compared to an elevation of 900 feet in the center of town. Washington Mountain and Coddington Brook, flowing down from October Mountain, are sources of water for the Town's reservoirs. Portions of nearby Lenox are also served by the water supply.

South lies another upland, cleaved by the picturesque Tyringham Valley. These uplands occupy a considerable area of the town and contain a variety of mountain streams.

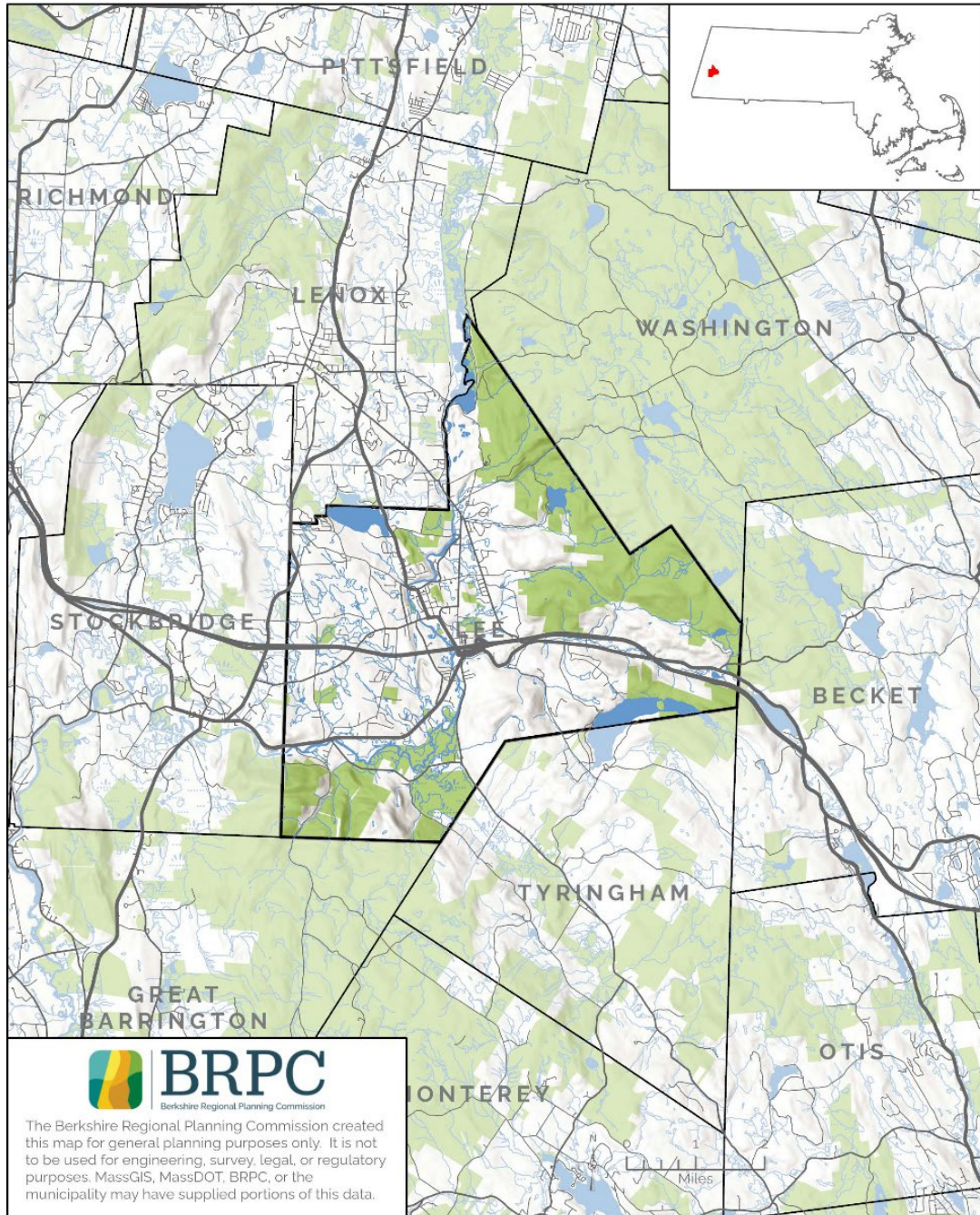
Beartown State Forest, straddling Lee, Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Tyringham, and Monterey, occupies many miles of upland and is a regional recreational site for swimming, hiking, and camping. Part of the Appalachian Trail goes through the southeastern portion of town connecting to Tyringham and Becket. To the north and west, the weathering of metamorphic rock has occurred to expose the rolling, limestone-underlain Housatonic Valley. The Rattlesnake Hill range to the west of town, separates the lowlands of Lee from the lowlands of Stockbridge. Small hills, such as those in the Golden Hill Town Forest in the northern part of town, dot the valley.

The most accessible agricultural land is most abundant in the western part of Lee. Agricultural uses have dwindled, as farm viability and profitability have become more difficult. High Lawn Farm, one of the region's few remaining dairy farms and only creamery is located on a hilltop overlooking Laurel Lake and stretches westward into Stockbridge. The Lee "Sandy Beach" is located on High Lawn Farm land and is used seasonally for recreational swimming, sunning, relaxation, picnics, and volleyball games. The beach is outfitted with Adirondack chairs, picnic tables, grills, beach toys, and a volleyball net. The grounds are beautifully landscaped and are available to town residents and lodgers at Lee accommodations.

Figure 2 Regional Context Map

Town of Lee
Open Space and Recreation Plan

Regional Context



The town's landscape is dominated by the Housatonic River, flowing south and eventually west through the town, is both a natural and economic resource. Three branches of the River meet in Pittsfield to the north and then flow through Lenox before arriving in Lee and continuing south through Connecticut to Long Island Sound. Chemical pollution from industries, located in Lee and upstream from Lee, has contaminated the river making it unsuitable for swimming and prohibiting anglers from consuming their catch.

Wastewater treatment instituted by local industries starting in the 1960s has abated some further deterioration of the river which today remains primarily a recreational resource for kayaking/canoeing and catch-and-release fishing. Local and regional environmental groups, including the Lee Land Trust, the Housatonic River Initiative, and the Housatonic Valley Association, have continued to work to clean up the river and plan for its increased recreational and scenic use.

Lee's steep, stony slopes, and floodplain along the river corridor, make usable and buildable land at a premium. This limits the town's population, its economic development, and its development of recreational areas. These natural characteristics also bring visitors to the town for their unspoiled beauty.

The town's economic base has continued to become more diversified with four of the last five paper mills closing their doors in 2008. The Onyx Paper Mill continues to operate in the former Hurlbut Mill in South Lee. Over the last forty-five years, weaving its way along Route 20, the main transportation route through town, commercial development has spread from the Turnpike interchange to Route 102. Lee has a core downtown retail center that serves town residents as well as the adjacent rural communities. The scenic downtown Lee Park and the tall spire of the Congregational Church are local landmarks that typify a historic New England village. An increased retail and hospitality presence serves to stimulate Lee's share of the Berkshire County tourism "pie".

History of the Community

Long before the arrival of European settlement, Lee was occupied by the Mohicans, seeking its productive areas for fishing, hunting and agriculture. The land use patterns and historic resources visible today may not clearly demonstrate the lives and cultures that called this place their home over many millennia. Yet, their presence remains, not just through archaeological resources but through the oral histories and traditions of their descendants.

The European settlement of Lee began in the eighteenth century when several families from Cape Cod settled in the hills of East Lee, in a community known as Dodgetown. In 1760, an early citizen, John Winegar, built a gristmill on the banks of the Greenwater and Goose Pond brooks in Dodgetown, which is believed to be the first local industry. In that same year, Isaac Davis settled on Hop Brook, and Ruben Pixley, Aswell Dodge, Jonathan Foote, Richard Hauk, John Freeze, and Peter Wilcox settled nearby with their households. The town was incorporated in 1777 and was named after a high-ranking officer in the Continental Army, General Charles Lee.

A number of Lee men served in the Revolutionary War and in 1786, many became deeply involved in Shay's Rebellion against imprisonment for debt. A confrontation between Shay's supporters and General Paterson's federal armed forces on Hamblin's Hill in Dodgetown resulted in a standoff. Historic Peter's Cave, located in a town-owned mountainous outcropping known as Ferncliff, is noted as the hiding place of Lee native Peter Wilcox during the rebellion.

As with many communities located along river valleys in Berkshire County, much of the landscape was cleared for agriculture in the 19th century. The gently rolling hills in the central portion of the town supported crops, pasture and livestock. A few active farms continue today: High Lawn Farm, which extends into neighboring Stockbridge, and the Leahey Farm in the foothills of October Mountain.

The waterpower of the Housatonic was exploited in the early years of settlement for saw and gristmills. As with most communities in the eighteenth century, agriculture was the primary component of economic activity. It was eventually eclipsed as industrial production, such as paper and textiles, concentrated along the riverbanks. Samuel Church built the first paper mill in South Lee in 1806. It was the second paper mill in Berkshire County, following the Crane Mill in Dalton which was built in 1801. The river was also used for various manufacturing purposes after the War of 1812, when unmet domestic demand prompted their development. Ball and Bassett & Company wove woolen cloth, Foote & Hinman made cotton cloth, Laflin & Loomis made gunpowder, and the Hurlbut family made carriages before being involved in papermaking.

Since the mid-1800s, the Town has developed a long and rich heritage as a paper mill community due in large part to the Housatonic River that flows through the north side of downtown. By 1867, due to the river and the arrival of the railroad, Lee was home to twenty-five paper mills and ranked first in the country's paper making industry. The devastating flood of 1886 forced the closing of the small mills in

East Lee. The surviving paper and sawmills moved to the center of town by rebuilding on the banks of the Housatonic River. This industrial heritage illustrates why Lee was long known as a mill town. By the 1930's, the paper business in Lee began to decline as the softwood forests, sources of wood pulp, were depleted. The mills continued to be major employers until 2008, when four of the last five paper mills in the town closed, resulting in a loss of 450 local jobs.

Quarrying became an established industry in the mid-1800s and continued to produce large quantities of marble until the 1930's in Lee. Lee marble, considered by many to be the best in the country, was used in the construction of many historic monuments and buildings in several U.S. cities. Among these were St. Patrick's Cathedral and Grant's Tomb in New York City and the State House annex and Public Library in Boston. Between 1852 and 1863, Lee supplied the marble for enlarging the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. The lime industry was well established by 1885, furnishing lime for building and agriculture. By the 1930's, the Lee Lime Corporation was ranked as one of the largest producers of lime in New England. Both lime and marble are still mined today.

In 1957 the Massachusetts Turnpike, a state toll road, connected Lee to Boston in less than three hours. The location of the primary entrance/exit for Berkshire County just south of downtown Lee made it a strong factor in the life and development of the Town and furthered the need for the Town to protect its conservation land.

In 1976, Lower Main Street was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The historic Main Street area, consisting of 18 buildings and an oval park, includes the Congregational Church, the Lee Library, the Lee Memorial Hall (Town Hall) and the Morgan House. These measures were taken not only to preserve Lee's rich architectural history but also to further prevent incompatible commercialization of the main thoroughfare through town. Individual structures such as the Lee Railroad Station and the Merrill Tavern in South Lee are also listed on the National Register.

Several restoration projects have been conducted by building owners along lower main street. The southern portion of the town is dominated by the steeple of the iconic Congregational Church, an iconic building recently renovated. The beautiful makeover of the former H.A. Johansson building into educational, office, restaurant and retail space has brightened up a large section of the street. The Lee Historical Society has been active in chronicling this rich and offering it through exhibits placed in Town Hall and the Lee Library.

With the paper mills shuttered and other industries relocating overseas, Lee has started a slow transformation from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy. Once a prominent stagecoach stop, downtown Lee has retained its historic look and now looks to revitalize downtown Lee into a vibrant social and economic center that focuses on serving residents, travelers and tourists.

A re-use of the Eagle Mill, a former paper mill, is underway. Plans are to redevelop the site with residential lofts, apartments, and townhouses with some street level retail establishments and several restaurants. The project will include a mix of affordable and market-rate housing.

Population Characteristics

The town's year-round population is estimated to be 5,784 residents.¹ Lee, because of its location near several Berkshire tourist attractions, such as Tanglewood and Jacob's Pillow, is also home to many seasonal residents who hail from New York City, Hartford, and Boston. Many of the estimated 700+ part-time residents own homes in developments surrounding area lakes or live in the newer condominium complexes. The daytime population also swells, particularly during the summer season, due to tourists visiting Lee or passing through to other destinations. For purposes of this report, the recreational needs of Lee residents are described as the primary audience for the town's parks and open space, with recognition that these areas will also be used and appreciated by visitors to the Berkshires.

Since recording 1,170 inhabitants in the first federal census of 1790, Lee grew steadily in population through the 1850s to a population of about 4,500 in 1860. During the 1800s, growth can be attributed to the waves of Irish, and then Italian immigrants who came to work in the mills and quarries. The town population during the second half of the 1800's hovered just under 4,000. During the 20th century, the town grew slowly until reaching a high of 6,426 residents in 1970.

During this period, Lee again began attracting newcomers, increasingly adding households with commuting links to Pittsfield and those drawn to the area for its natural beauty and quality of life. From 1960 to 1970, Lee's population increased by 1,255 residents or 21.9%. During the population boom of the '60s and early '70s, new shopping areas were developed adjacent to the downtown, with lower Main Street also seeing an influx of small retail and service businesses. At the same time, many of the stately homes of the industrialists in South Lee were converted to small business use, primarily country inns and antique shops which gives the village commercial district double duty as a tourist destination.

Since the mid-1970s, Lee's population has slowly declined. From 1980 to 2020, the population decreased by 7.3%, from 6,247 to 5,788 residents. The racial mix of the community is rather homogeneous, with 90.8% of the population classified as white in 2021. Recent years have witnessed a small influx of Hispanic immigrants who have mostly settled in the downtown neighborhoods.

The population decline over the last several decades is the result of a combination of factors such as emigration from the community and decreased immigration as employment has decreased. Another reason is the declining birth rate. In 2000, Children under 14 comprised 18% of the population; by 2021,

¹ Data from the US Census American Community Survey 2021 and is available at

[Lee - Berkshire Benchmarks](#)

that number had decreased to 12.7%. At the same time, improvements to health care have extended life spans and led to changes in the age distribution of the community. In 1970, 10.3% of Lee's residents were over 65 years of age, but by 2021 the elderly represented 21.2% of the population, almost double that of 1970. By 2030 the United States population over age 65 is expected to overtake the number of those under 18.

In Berkshire County, this shift already occurred in 2011. This appears to be a permanent change in Berkshire County with the number of adults over 65 continuing to increase and the percentage of children continuing to decline. With the growing aging trend expected to continue, recreational facilities will need to be designed that are more accessible to seniors and persons with disabilities. While Lee Schools are expected to continue to decrease in enrollments. District data shows current enrollments at 438 students in the district (2023), a decrease of 269 students from 2003 enrollment of 707.

Shifts in population density within and around the town have not been remarkable over the last forty years, though residential development on the town's edges has changed the population density and distribution, making the population more widely distributed. Traditionally high-density residential development is concentrated in the town center, where a mix of 19th-century single-family homes, duplexes, and multi-family residences were built to supply housing for industrial executives, mill workers, and their families, and small businesses and their owners.

A few high-density residential subdivisions, with small homes on small lots, were built in the 1950s, such as those on East Street. In addition, small trailer parks were built along Bradley Street and Water Street near the turnpike. Newer homes and condominiums were built further away from the town center and on former agricultural land on the outskirts of town. An increasing portion of these newer homes are owned by seasonal homeowners. More modern multi-family housing is scattered in a few areas of the town some of which are affordable housing (Hyde Place, Brown Memorial Court, and Clark Court) and some of which are more recent condominium developments (Foxhollow and October Mountain).

The most notable factors in the population decline is out-migration, forced by reduced employment in Lee's largest industry, papermaking, the demise of other high-paying manufacturing jobs in the region, and young adults leaving for college and not returning. This economic trend has not been restricted to Lee. The manufacturing base in Berkshire County has been declining during the past three decades, while employment opportunities increased in the lower-paying service sector, particularly in retail, hospitality, and health services. The net effect has been a declining non-residential tax base and increased dependence on residential property taxes.

In Lee, this trend was partially stemmed by the addition of the Berkshire Outlet Village to the tax rolls in 1997. The largest employers in the town are in the public sector between the town employees and school system. Retail is the largest private employment sector in the town in 2023 with the Prime Outlets

and McLee Inc. -McDonalds Franchise- employing many in the town (Lee has three McDonald's restaurants with one in town and two on the Turnpike.)

Overall, the lack of economic growth over the last several decades, coupled with fewer residents employed in manufacturing, has made it difficult for taxpayers to keep up with upgrading the town's services. Since the closing of the former Clark-Aiken manufacturing plant reported in the 2000 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, four of the last five paper mills in town have closed. Following the closure of the mills in 2008, the mills remain primarily vacant and significantly underused. Recently (summer of 2023) demolition work began at the Eagle Mill Redevelopment Project at the north end of the town. The planned mixed-use development will add much needed housing to the downtown area. One goal of the project is to reuse as much salvageable materials as possible from the demolition.

Since 2010, Lee's employment numbers have been stable, but its economy has become increasingly diverse. The economic base has broadened in recent years encompassing the largest job increases in trade/retail and service sectors. Growth has also occurred in the cannabis sector, with one major retailer located just off the Massachusetts Turnpike and a cultivator in South Lee. Both businesses have helped fill the tax and employment gaps left by closed mills. A small increase of 29 in manufacturing jobs also occurred during this time period, but this increase does not begin to make up for the hundreds of losses that occurred when the four paper mills closed in 2008.² Lee, like many other local communities, benefits from the tourist industry. The Lee Outlet Village and the downtown are partly visitor destinations. Lee benefits from major cultural attractions in and around the Berkshires; its motels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, and gas stations benefit from travelers visiting cultural attractions in neighboring Stockbridge and Lenox such as the Norman Rockwell Museum and Tanglewood. Other major employers in the town, not previously mentioned, include Berkshire Sterile Manufacturing Inc., Ray Murray Inc., Patriot Armored Systems Holding, LLC, Vermas LLC, and Boyd Biomedical.

Income data available from the Division of Local Services' 2024 Cherry Sheet show that Lee is less prosperous than many other communities in the Commonwealth. Currently it ranks 238 out of 351 municipalities in median household income. The median household income in 2021 was \$73,750 or 82% of the state average (\$89,645). However, compared to the statewide average of 21.5%, Lee had 0% of its residents with incomes below poverty level. Lee is a town with a strong culture of volunteerism, promoting a vibrant food pantry, English As Second Language Programs, and awarding financial assistance for youth sports programming.

A large geographical area of the town east of the town center is considered by the Executive Office of Energy and the Environment as an Environmental Justice (EJ) Area (See Figure 19). The area has been determined as an EJ because the median household income for residents within this census block is less

² Source: Mass. Exec. Office of Labor & Workforce Development

than or equal to 65.5% of the state average. The population within the EJ area is approximately 1,000 people, which is approximately 17% of the town's population.

The resident population trends suggest minor change in the number of people to be served with recreational activities but has significant variability in needs. Based on Lee's age distribution and measures of wealth, recreational activities will need to be diverse while development opportunities may be limited. Although there is currently great demand for recreational opportunities for children, the town will need to focus more on the increasing needs of its elderly citizens in the future.

Growth and Development Patterns

Though early settlement was in Dodgetown in East Lee, the population center for the town has been concentrated in the central village, radiating from the Lee town center since the latter part of the eighteenth century. In the town center the first church and park were established, and from there most settlement radiated outward. Small settlements, many with retail businesses, continued to exist in South Lee and East Lee. Neighborhoods, each with their own recreational areas and schools, were often homogenous pockets for different ethnic groups. Housing for the many industrial workers sprang up in close proximity to the paper mills and quarries. Large tracts of farmland used for livestock and silage crops insulated the town center in all directions. To the south and east, unsettled forestland predominated.

With the advent of popular usage of the automobile, residential development spread beyond the original areas. In the post-World War II era, this dispersion accelerated as large farms and large expanses of agricultural land were converted to residential and other uses. Except for a handful of remaining large tracts, the large farmlands have disappeared and were replaced mostly by single family homes scattered along rural roads that have altered the open spaces and scenic views. South Lee, though still maintaining a post office, is no longer the commercial and population center it once was.

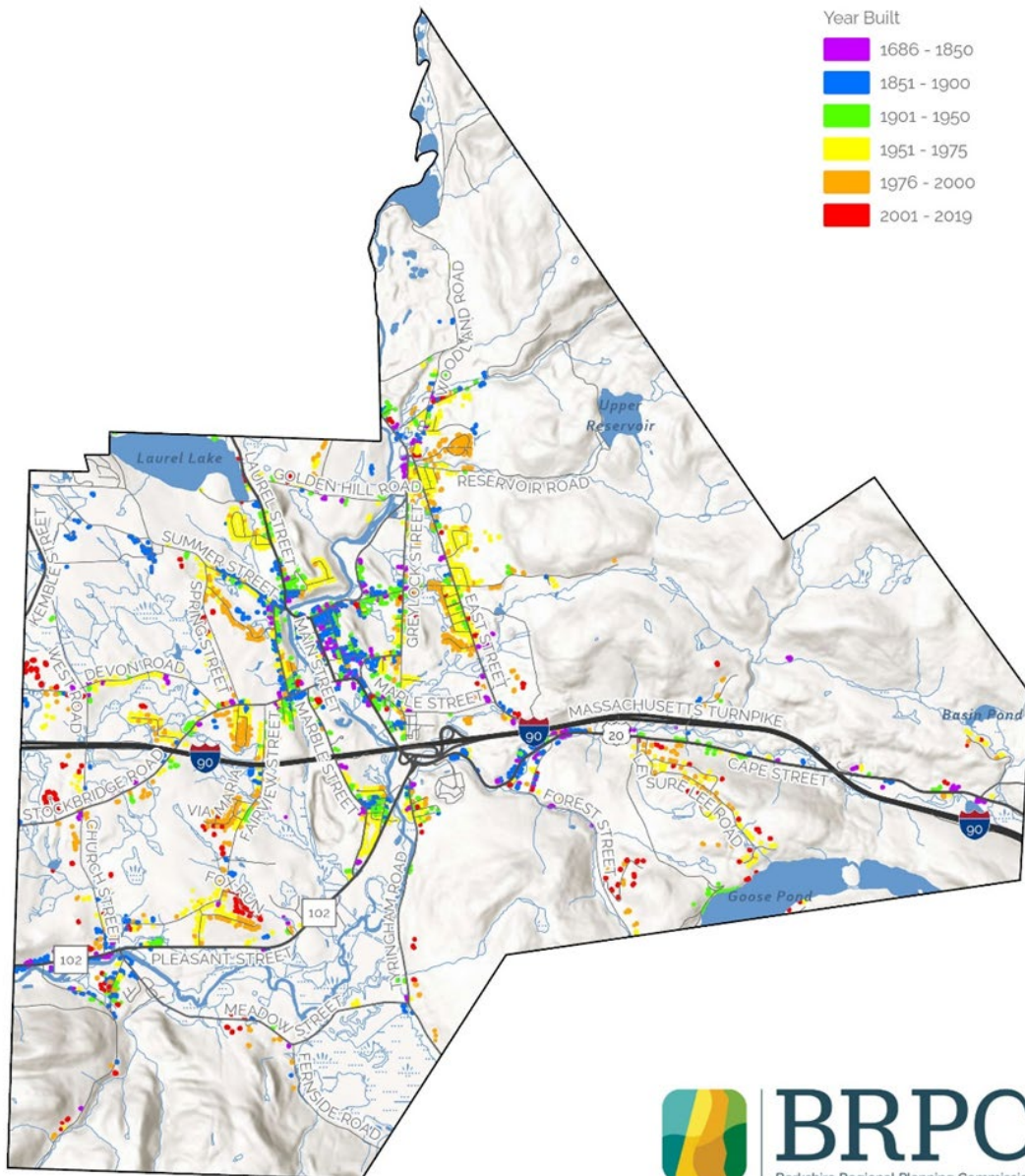
Development over the past few decades has continued to be dispersed single family homes, but with the addition of seasonal housing. Holiday Inn's Oak N Spruce (Silverleaf Resorts) resort is also located in South Lee. A private development of second homes, Berkshire Hills Leisure Lee, was developed on the south shore of Lower Goose Pond. There is a condominium development on the side of October Mountain. Though not a large presence, mobile home parks occupy a small tract near the Massachusetts Turnpike and the Bradley Park area in northeast Lee. Public projects, built by the town and Commonwealth, provide housing for physically challenged residents. Senior housing is provided in the former Lee Elementary School on High Street, Hyde Place on Main Street, and Brown Memorial Court on Marble Street. Clarke Court provides affordable housing for economically challenged families. In 2013, 57 Main Street was renovated to offer affordable housing on its upper floors and maintaining the first floor as retail space.

Patterns and Trends

Figure 3 Development Trend Map

Town of Lee
Open Space and Recreation Plan

Development Trend Map

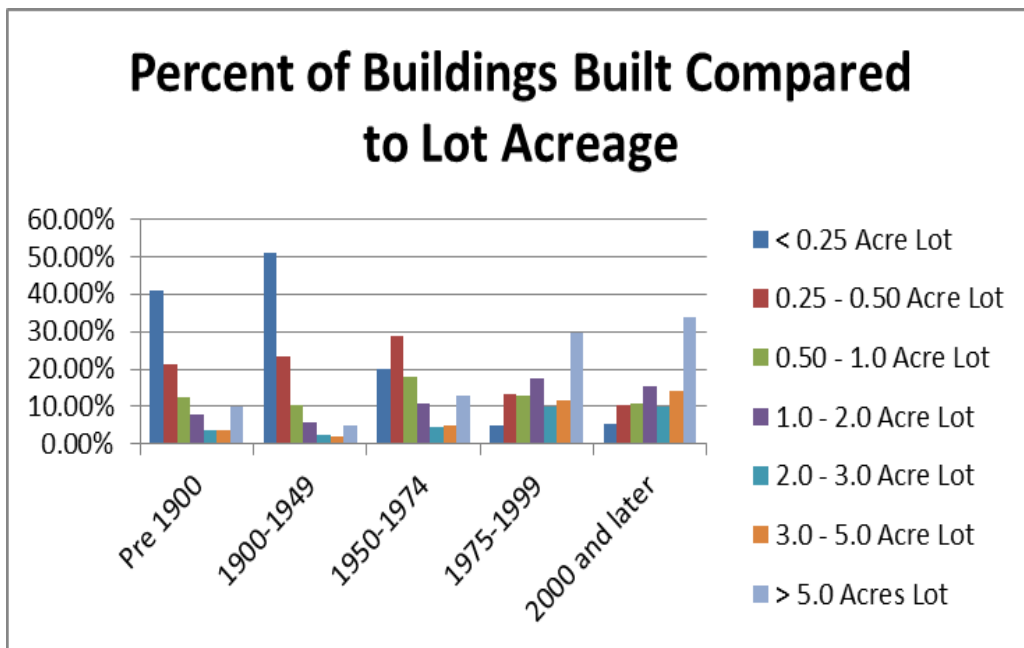


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Although a few subdivisions have been built in Lee in the past few decades, residential development continues to be primarily single-family homes built along existing roads. Approval-Not-Required (or "ANR") development refers to the subdivision of single lots with frontage on a public way. Under state law, lots on a public way that meet zoning dimensional requirements for frontage may be subdivided without substantive planning board review. Historically large lots, which tend to be forest or open fields, are subdivided into several lots along the roadway. ANR development fragments woodlands, wetlands and fields, and scenic vistas, and creates remnant parcels too small or too isolated to support farming or forestry activities and degrades habitat for most wildlife species.

As noted in the Land Use Section of the *Sustainable Berkshires Plan* (2014), residential development trends have changed in recent decades, with larger homes being built on larger lots. This trend continues even as the number of people per household has decreased. Prior to 1950, most residential units in Berkshire County were built in lots less than ¼ acre. Between 1950 and 1974 most residential units were built on lots ¼ - ½ acre in size. Since 1975 this trend changed significantly with many homes built on lots greater than 5 acres. Since 2000, 33% of the residential units built in the Berkshires have been built on lots greater than 5 acres (see Figure 4 “Percent of Building Built Compared to Lot Acreage”.)

Figure 4 Graph of Lot Sizes over Time



As the *Sustainable Berkshires Plan* also notes, the Berkshires have seen an increase in the number of housing units being built as seasonal homes. The Berkshires have for more than 150 years been a place where visitors come to enjoy the fresh air and pastoral qualities of the region. However, the number of

seasonal homes in Lee remained low, at an average of 10% of new homes built 1900-1974. During the years 1975-1999, the percentage of seasonal housing units in the town increased dramatically to 69% of total new home construction. Although seasonal home construction post-2000 has declined, it is still

substantial at 32% of total units. Seasonal homes tend to be built on much larger parcels than non-seasonal homes. According to county-wide data, about half of year-round residential homes are built on parcels of two acres or less, while 75% of seasonal homes are built on parcels exceeding two acres. Half of the total seasonal homes built are situated on parcels exceeding 5 acres.

Continued sprawl and increased large-lot development could threaten the rural and scenic qualities that residents value and to which seasonal homeowners are drawn. Planning for continued residential growth could include identifying the town's highest priority scenic, natural, and cultural assets and developing strategies to steer inappropriate development away from these areas.

Since the 1960s, the townspeople have taken an interest in preserving a portion of the remaining unspoiled land in town for watershed and recreational use. Additional conservation land has been acquired along Laurel Lake, in the Tyringham Valley, and near South Lee. More recently the large expanse of open lands on scenic Golden Hill were protected from development by a sale to Robert Bartini for additional grazing for his large herd of cattle. It should be noted that housing pressures are not entirely alleviated by the decrease in population—the number of housing units in Lee increased dramatically between 1975 and 1999, even as the overall population slightly decreased. Luckily, forest land has been left untouched because of its steep slopes and remains conserved, even though much of it is privately held. One exception is the construction of the Berkshire Outlet Village retail complex on a previously forested tract overlooking the Turnpike, for which extensive slope cuts were made. An official plan regarding watchful maintenance and preservation of conservation land and future acquisition of open space still needs to be put in place.

The building of the Massachusetts Turnpike, and the upgrading of former country routes, such as Route 102, to 2-lane highways, spurred development away from the center of town. Businesses such as gas stations, fast food restaurants, and motels sprang up near the Turnpike entrance in the 1960s and '70s. Commercial and civic activity was concentrated along Main Street in the center of town and along Routes 20 and 102, radiating away from the Massachusetts Turnpike interchange.

The Route 102 area has been rezoned as industrial and is home to several light industries. In 1987, the Windsock Industrial Park was privately developed. In 1997, the Quarry Hill Business Park was created along this route. It is intended to attract new industry to replace jobs lost in the traditional paper and machine manufacturing industries. Some of the industrial parks and light industries, such as Boyd Biomedical and Excelsior Integrated, have invested in facilities in South Lee on 102 and/or Pleasant Street. Continued careful development will be needed to avoid changing the character of the roadway from a rural roadway to a commercial and industrial corridor.

The impact of the changing land use patterns on recreational use and open space are many. Specifically:

- a. The conversion of most of the remaining farmland and increased housing development have threatened the rural landscape and scenic views that have traditionally existed in all sections of town except the town center.
- b. The haphazard development of the commercial district has diminished the scenic beauty and impressions made on visitors when they are entering this "gateway" town. The rural landscape and the New England character of the buildings is important to Lee, and other Berkshire communities, in maintaining the quality of life desired by residents and in attracting tourists.
- c. State forests and neighborhood recreational facilities are more extensive than in many surrounding communities. A proposed multi use trail along the Housatonic River connecting the center of town to the Lee Outlets and the Big Y has been in development for several years. This trail will provide opportunities for pedestrian usage and neighborhood interaction though there remain concerns about ownership and maintenance.
- d. Popular concerts and events at the Tanglewood Music Center have an impact on Lee traffic and often result in traffic congestion in the town, particularly as concertgoers leave the venue.
- e. The Town has joined approximately 50 other communities and 4 other Berkshire County towns in becoming an Appalachian Trail community (June 2023). This designation recognizes the town's efforts to assist and encourage Appalachian Trail hikers that visit the town.

Transportation System

The Massachusetts Turnpike, an Interstate highway, connects the town of Lee via Exit 10, to the major metropolitan areas of Boston, Springfield, and westward to Albany and Buffalo, New York. The Lee interchange is one of only two existing interchanges in the Berkshires, with substantial automobile traffic traveling through downtown Lee on Route 20.

Route 20 is a major arterial which runs through Lee connecting it to the neighboring towns of Lenox and Becket. Route 20 as it travels through Lee is also part of the Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway, a state-recognized scenic byway. The Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway, Inc. is a non-profit organization that works to maintain the natural beauty and historic character of the corridor.

Route 102 is Lee's other major arterial linking the town to neighboring Stockbridge to the west. Route 102 is increasingly important as a main commercial and industrial corridor, due in large part to its close proximity to the turnpike exit. The town's last remaining paper mill, Onyx Specialty Papers (an old Mead Paper property in South Lee) is located on this route utilizing the power of the Housatonic River.

Lee's main public transportation system is the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority's (BRTA) local bus service connecting Lee with Pittsfield to the north and Great Barrington to the south. It runs six days a week on a regular schedule from early morning until early evening. Bus Route 2 is a north/south route that links residents to Lenox and Pittsfield via Main Street, Greylock Street and the Lee Premium Outlets, while Bus Route 21 is an east/west link along Route 102 between the Lee Outlets and Stockbridge and Great Barrington. BRTA also provides on demand paratransit services for eligible riders, with advance notice (see BRTA website for more information.)

Recreational areas located directly on a bus route include the Lee Middle/High School, River Park, Housatonic Street Athletic Field, and the Soccer Fields, and recreational areas located within a short walk of the routes (within ½ mile) include October Mountain State Forest, Woods Pond, and Ferncliff. Greyhound and Peter Pan bus lines provide long distance service throughout Massachusetts and to Vermont, Connecticut, and New York City.

Sidewalks radiate from the town center, linking some but not all densely developed neighborhoods to recreational lands. Outstanding sidewalk routes include Main Street to Golden Hill Road and Main Street to October Mountain State Forest (via Columbia, Greylock or East streets). Outside of the town center rural arterial and minor roads generally do not have sidewalks. Currently Lee has designated bicycle lanes along Route 102 from Stockbridge to Route 20 at the Mass Pike Intersection. Beginning around 2008, the Lee Bikeway Committee developed an ambitious goal to create a 6.7-mile bikeway/pedestrian route through Lee that would connect the town to neighboring Stockbridge and Lenox. Route 102, which has wide shoulders, is the only section completed and connects to the proposed trail along the Housatonic River. North of the town the proposed route would be a mix of off-road and on-road to Lenox Dale.

Currently town officials and MassDOT are moving forward with a multi-use trail along the Housatonic River. The mile-long path would extend approximately from Big Y to Lee Bank. The town is currently finishing design work and acquiring site control. Construction is planned for 2027 or 2028. Results of the survey indicate support among townspeople.

The closest airport is the municipal airport in Pittsfield, which is 10 miles away. Lee is within an hour and a half drive of two major airports in Albany and Hartford and a two-and-a-half-hour drive to Logan Airport in Boston and the Providence (RI) Airport. Limousine service is available to the airports in Albany, Hartford, Boston, and New York. The Council on Aging provides local transportation service to seniors and persons with disabilities.

The only train service currently operating is the Housatonic freight line that runs from the north end of Lee along the Housatonic River through the center of town and then to the west. The line is utilized to transport raw materials and products for manufacturing and industry. Passenger service to New York City is available at Poughkeepsie and Wassaic, NY, and service to Boston or Chicago is available from Pittsfield.

There is no passenger rail station in Lee since passenger service was eliminated in 1971. However, the East-West passenger rail study has proposed re-establishing passenger rail service between Boston, Springfield and Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Figure 5 Hay Field, looking East.

Photo Credit: Mary Brittain



Water Supply Systems

Lee draws its public water supply from town surface water reservoirs located on October Mountain. The Town obtains its public water supply primarily from the Schoolhouse and Leahey Reservoirs. A large proportion of these watershed areas are currently protected. In addition, the Vanetti Reservoir and October Mountain Lake are available as backup water supplies if a need arises.

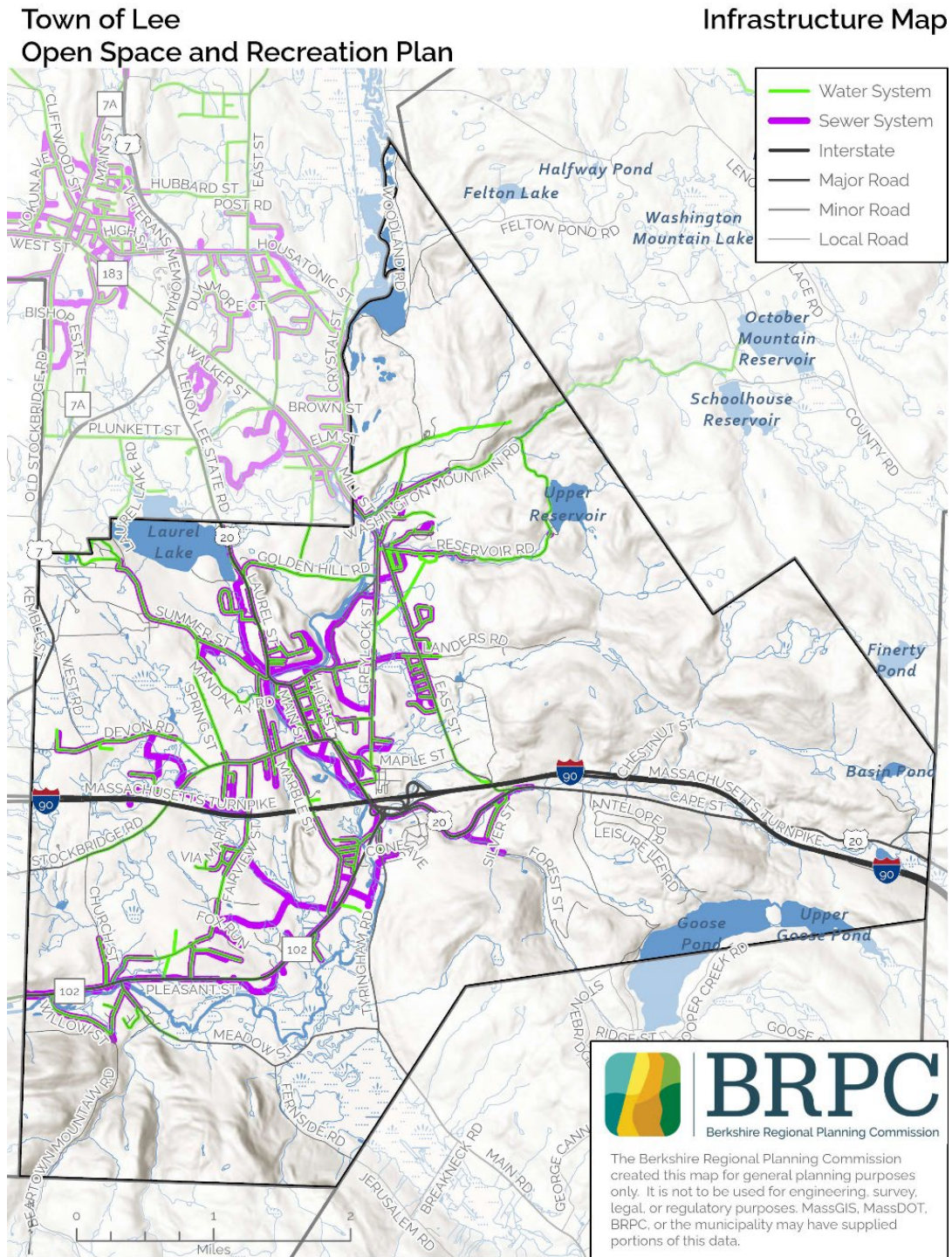
Sewer Service and Septic

Most of the Town of Lee is sewerred, with the exception of a significant hamlet, East Lee, and a seasonal development, Leisure Lee. The present sewer system extends to the development at Foxhollow above Laurel Lake in Lenox and along the Route 102 industrial district(See Figure 4). The construction of a new municipal wastewater treatment plant was completed in 2008. Through the construction of the new plant, average daily flow capacity increased from 1 million to 1.25 million gallons per day, and the nutrient removal efficiency has greatly increased. The EPA has awarded the town the Wastewater Treatment Excellence Award because of the exemplary operation/management of the plant.

Onyx Specialty Papers Inc. on Route 102 sends its industrial wastewater to a treatment facility that is still owned and operated by Mead Corporation. Schweitzer-Maudit formerly operated its own wastewater treatment facilities, but these are no longer operational. The Schweitzer facilities were purchased by Niagara Worldwide LLC and a new permit would be required if these wastewater treatment facilities were to become operational again.

Residential septic systems surrounding Laurel Lake contribute little bacteria to the lake but do contribute nutrients that may be aggravating the long-standing problem with weed growth. The Town of Lee extended its sewer lines along Bramble Lane in Lenox, giving all residents the option of tying into the system. To date approximately half of the homes on the lane have been tied into the system.

Figure 6 Water Infrastructure Map



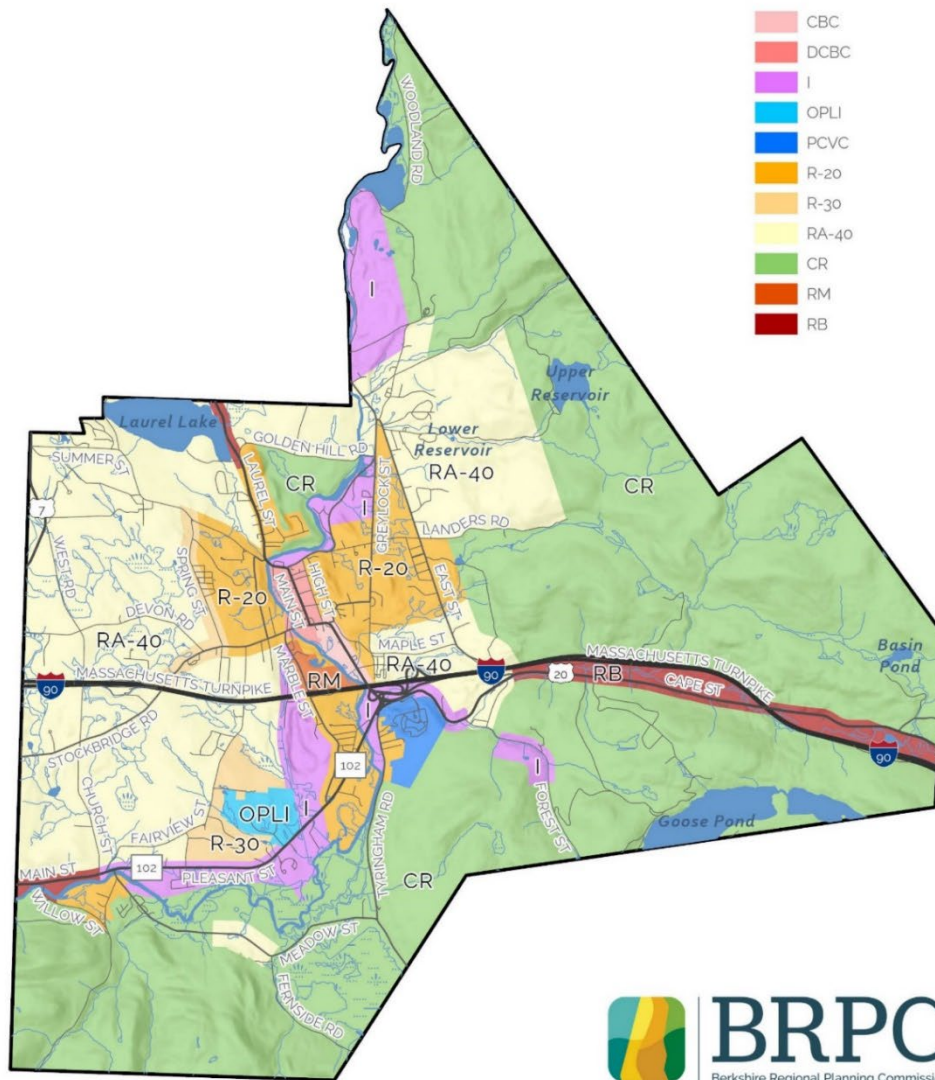
Long Term Development Patterns

Given development trends over the past several decades and given existing zoning, it is expected that Lee will continue to see a mix of year-round and seasonal home construction, and possibly increased commercial/industrial development along Route 102. The building boom of the 1970-90s has dwindled since the recession and housing implosion that began in 2008. Current mortgage rates continue to hinder new construction in the town. Home prices in Lee, as in other South County communities, continue to

Figure 7 Zoning Map

Town of Lee
Open Space and Recreation Plan

Zoning Map



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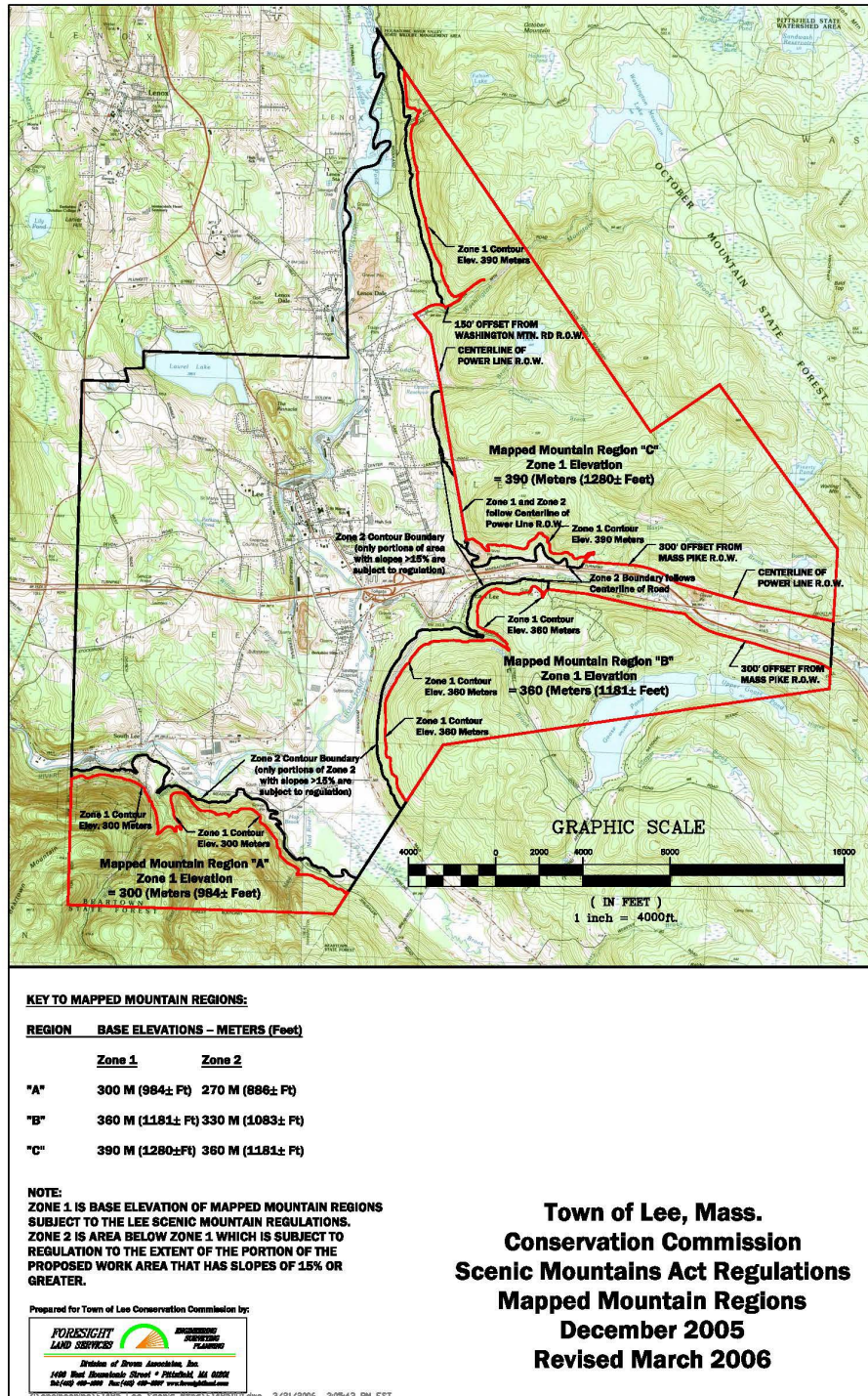
increase due to market demand. This demand could increase if passenger rail between NYC and Lee comes to fruition.

Land use in Lee is controlled through the zoning by-laws, originally adopted in 1963 and through subdivision control regulations. The current zoning districts are shown in Figure 5. The zoning includes an environmental review procedure in several instances where special permits are required.

In 2008, the town established a Scenic Mountain Overlay District, enabled by the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act (MGL Ch. 131, Sec. 39A). The purpose of the law is to regulate land disturbance activities that could have a significant adverse effect on watershed resources or natural scenic qualities because of water quality pollution or destruction of vegetation. Most land disturbance activities that involve removal, filling, excavation, clearing, or other alteration of land located within the district, including projects requiring a special permit and single-family homes, will require the filing of a Notice of Intent with the Lee Conservation Commission. Upon review, the Commission has the authority to apply special conditions to the development to avoid or minimize natural resource degradation. Other notable changes to zoning include major modifications to sign regulations, creation of an Adaptive Reuse Overlay District (2009), regulation of adult entertainment (2006), wind energy facility bylaws (2007), and a zoning map amendment moving some areas from Industrial into RB Rural Business and RA-40 zones (2009).

As a result of environmental and other development constraints, much of the future development can be expected to occur on marginal land and will place environmentally sensitive lands in a more vulnerable position. Agricultural lands are vulnerable to development because of easy accessibility. Unless measures are taken, dramatic alterations to the character and identity of the community could occur.

Figure 8 Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act, Lee Map



Environmental Inventory and Analysis

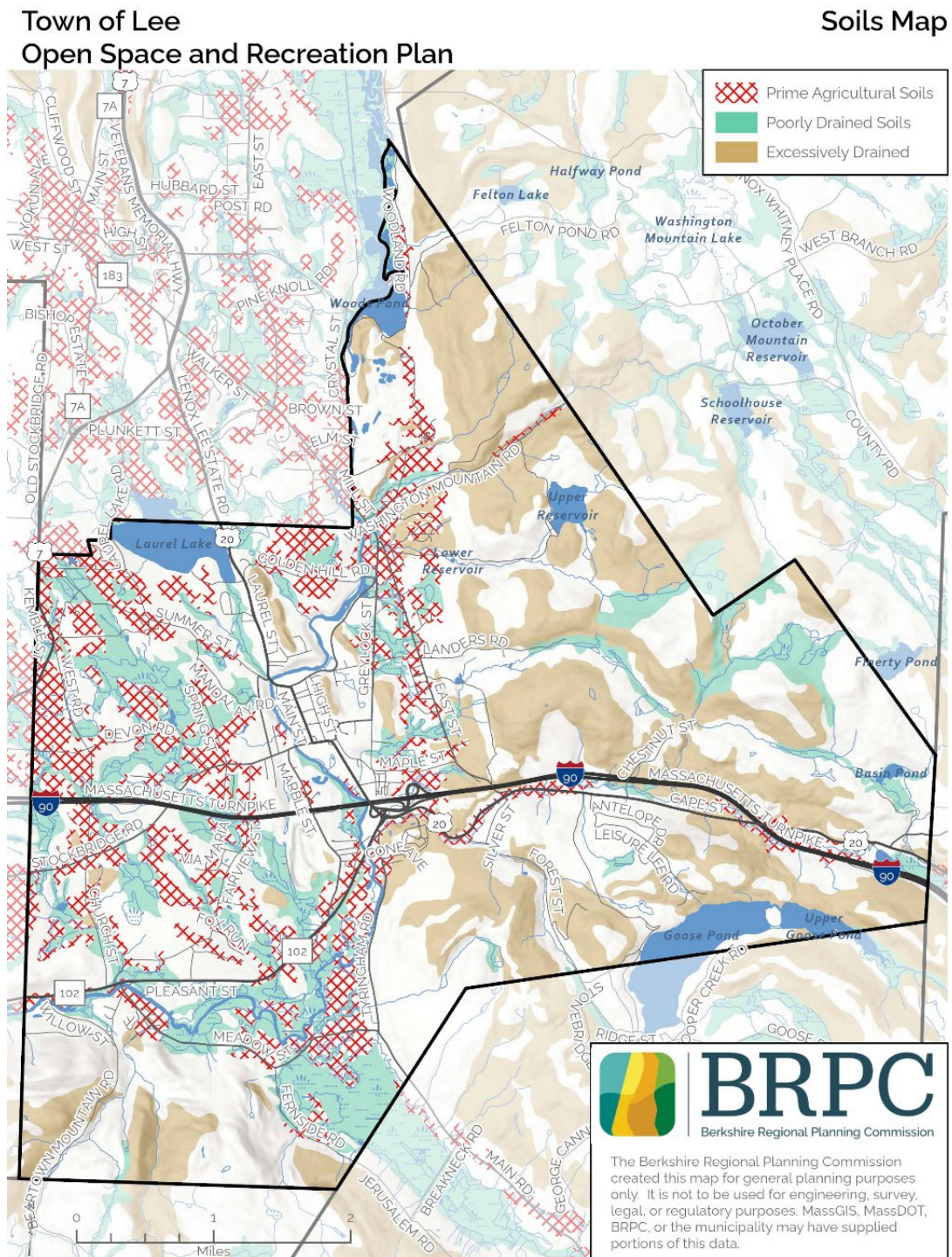
Geology, Soils, and Topography

Topographically, two distinct types of landforms cover the Town of Lee. To the east is the hilly Berkshire Plateau, and to the north and west the land opens out onto the rolling Housatonic Valley. To the south lies another upland, pierced by the picturesque Tyringham Valley. The uplands occupy a considerable area of the town and are dissected by mountain streams including Coddington Brook, Beartown Brook, and Greenwater Pond Brook.

Steep slopes are the largest single physical element affecting the future development of the community. Approximately 6,500 acres, 37% of the total area of 17,350 acres, can be considered steep slopes and protect the scenic vistas which townspeople treasure. The largest area is to the east where the mountainsides of the New England Upland have been deeply cut by mountain streams.

The bedrock geology of the town is characterized by the soft, carbonate rock formation which underlies the more developed, western portion of the community, and the more resistant gneissic rocks which dominate in the upland areas. The pattern of limestone deposits and location of more resistant rocks has had a significant impact on the development of this community. The floor of the Housatonic Valley is underlain by Stockbridge Limestone of Ordovician Age. The lower dolomitic part of the formation has been mined for its marble for building purposes, and the upper calcitic part is used for commercial fertilizers. The high-quality marble extracted from Lee Marble Company has been used in buildings and monuments all along the Northeast, including the House and Senate wings of the U.S. Capital, the Boston Public Library, New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral, Grant's Tomb, and Philadelphia's City Hall. Lee's marble also has been used in many of the Town's important buildings, including the former Lee High School, the Lee Fire Station, the former St. George's Episcopal Church, and in many of the area's Great Estates Cottages. Lee Lime Corporation continues to provide high-quality lime products. The New England Upland to the east and south is primarily made up of Micaceous Quartzite, Becket Granite Gneiss and Hinsdale Gneiss, while the less resistant rocks that remain on the valley floor and as part of the Taconic Range to the west are Berkshire Schist and Amphibole Schist.

Figure 9 Soils Map



The surficial geology of the town reflects both deposits of glacial origin and more recent deposits associated with the flooding of the Housatonic River and its tributaries. The upland areas are covered with a thin mantle of glacial till, a poorly sorted mixture of silt, sand, gravel, boulders, and clay deposited

directly by the glacial ice as it advanced generally from the northwest to southeast. As the glacier melted and retreated from the area about 18,000 years ago, meltwater streams deposited layers of sand and gravel. The most important materials left behind in this process in Lee were the coarse grained, ice contact stratified drift deposits that currently fill the valley of Greenwater Pond Brook and the area immediately south of Woods Pond. These deposits have a significant impact on the groundwater potential of the area.

Soil characteristics also differ dramatically between the more developed portion of town and the uplands to the east. The upland area is severely sloped and dominated by extremely stony, acidic soils with shallow depth to bedrock. Sandy, gravelly soils on terraces characterize the area south of Woods Pond and east along the Massachusetts Turnpike and Greenwater Pond Brook, while rich alluvial soils cover much of the floodplain of the Housatonic River. Poorly drained mineral and organic soils are also found in wetlands and low areas that border the Housatonic River and its tributaries, including areas along Meadow Street. In the western third of the town are mixed, scattered areas of stony, limestone soils, poorly drained mineral and organic soils and stony acid soils with hardpans. This area contains the majority of well-drained soils, of which a significant portion is considered prime agricultural land. See Figure 7.

Landscape Character

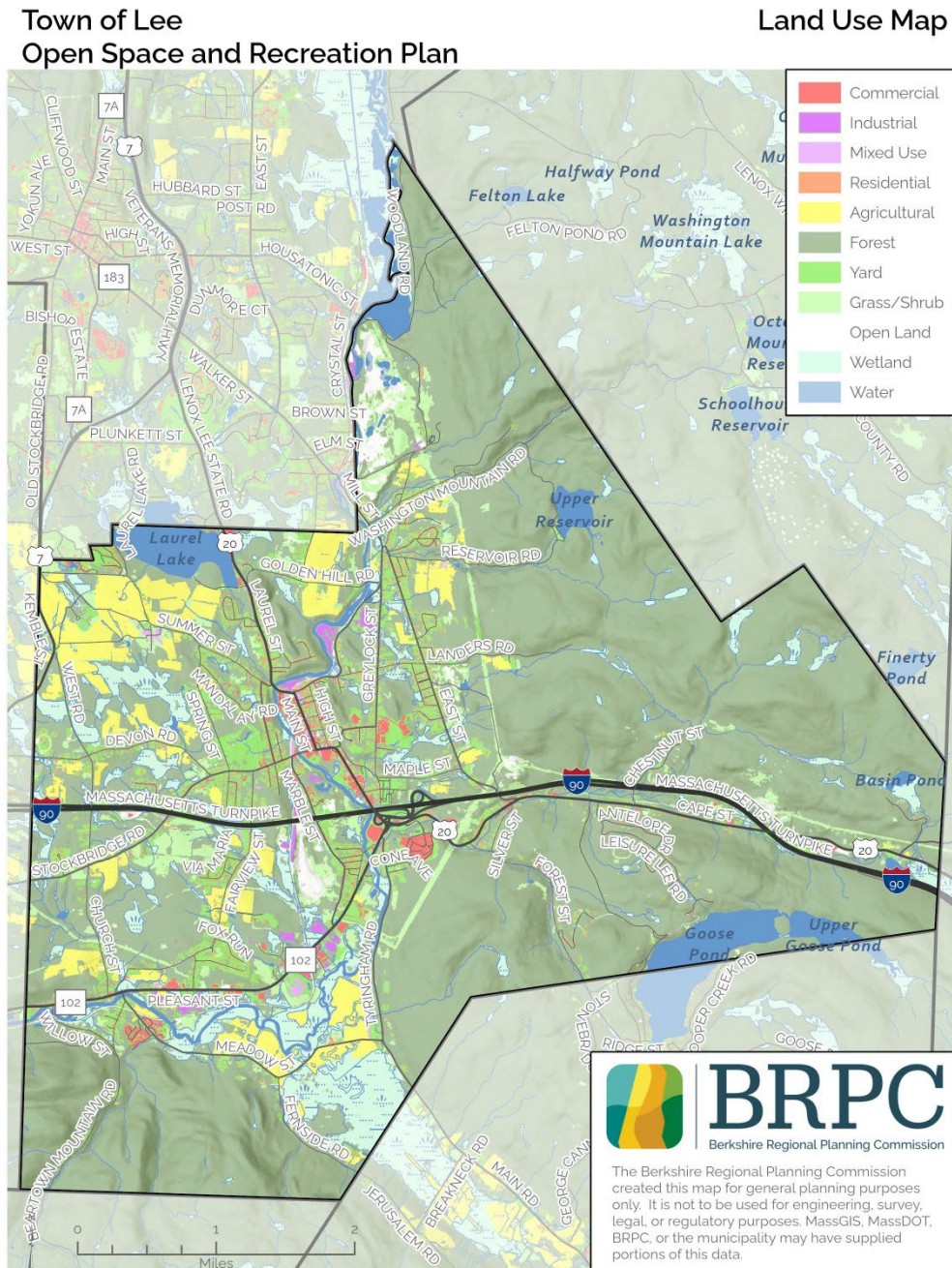
The character of the Lee landscape is defined by a unique blend of natural and social features such as vibrant town center which underwent a significant revitalization in 1997. Downtown Lee, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is an intact, cohesive grouping of buildings that typifies the architecture of a late nineteenth century mill town.

Table 1: Lee Land Uses

General Land Use Category	Acres	Percent of Total
Industrial, Open Land	300	2%
Commercial, Mixed Use	185	1%
Residential	253	1%
Agricultural	942	5%
Forest	11,552	67%
Lawn, Turf	1,196	7%
Grassland, Shrub	1,138	7%
Wetlands	1,154	7%
Open Water	561	3%
Total	17,281	100%

According to the Bureau of Geographic Information (MassGIS) Land Use data, Lee remains largely undeveloped, with forest canopy covering 11,552 acres, which is 67% of the total land area of the Town. Open lands such as agricultural fields (pasture, hay fields, crop lands), grasslands and shrubs (including most utility rights of way) cover 2,079 acres, or 12% of the total. Industrial, commercial (including municipal buildings), mixed use and open lands (the last including the Lane gravel pit, Lee Lime marble quarry and some rights of way), cover 485 acres, or 3% of total land area.

Figure 10 Land Use Map



Residential development covers 253 acres or just one percent of the total land area of Lee. Lawn and turf cover 7% of Lee which includes lawns around homes and businesses and the 59 acres of land at Greenock Golf Course. If calculating all developed land uses including Industrial, Commercial, Residential

and Lawn/turf, approximately 11% of the Town can be considered developed in some form. Wetlands, which include ecosystems such as forested, emergent and scrub/shrub wetlands, cover 7% of total land cover, while open water such as lakes and ponds cover 3% of the total Town. For a full breakdown of land uses, see Table 1 and refer to the Land Use Map., Figure 8.

Water Resources

Lee is rich in water resources, including brooks, streams, ponds, vernal pools, wetlands, and aquifers (See Water Resources Map 6, Appendix A). This section focuses on waters within the Town of Lee, but it is important to keep in mind that improvements in water quality in the Housatonic River, Laurel Lake, and other brooks, streams and wetlands have impacts beyond town borders.

Coordination with towns both upstream and downstream is necessary to clean and restore the Housatonic River and preserve its scenic and natural beauty. This includes the Housatonic Rest of River cleanup, which involves removal of PCBs from the river corridor that extends along the river's length from Pittsfield south to Great Barrington. The town's surface water sources provide clean drinking water (primarily Schoolhouse Lake and Leahey Reservoirs) and provide scenic and recreational resources to residents and tourists.

Watersheds

Lee lies within the Housatonic River Basin, which drains the entire town through a complex system of tributary streams, brooks and small rivulets too numerous to mention. The Housatonic River enters the Town of Lee from Lenox at Woods Pond, in the northern portion of town, and flows in a south-southwesterly direction, through the town center, before exiting the Town's western border into the Town of Stockbridge. Along the way it is joined directly by several major tributaries including Washington Mountain Brook, Coddington Brook, Goose Pond Brook and Hop Brook. Other streams that indirectly feed into the Housatonic River are Greenwater Pond Brook, Basin Pond Brook, Mad River, Willow Brook and Commons Brook. For an overview of water resources, refer to the Water Resources Map Figure 10.

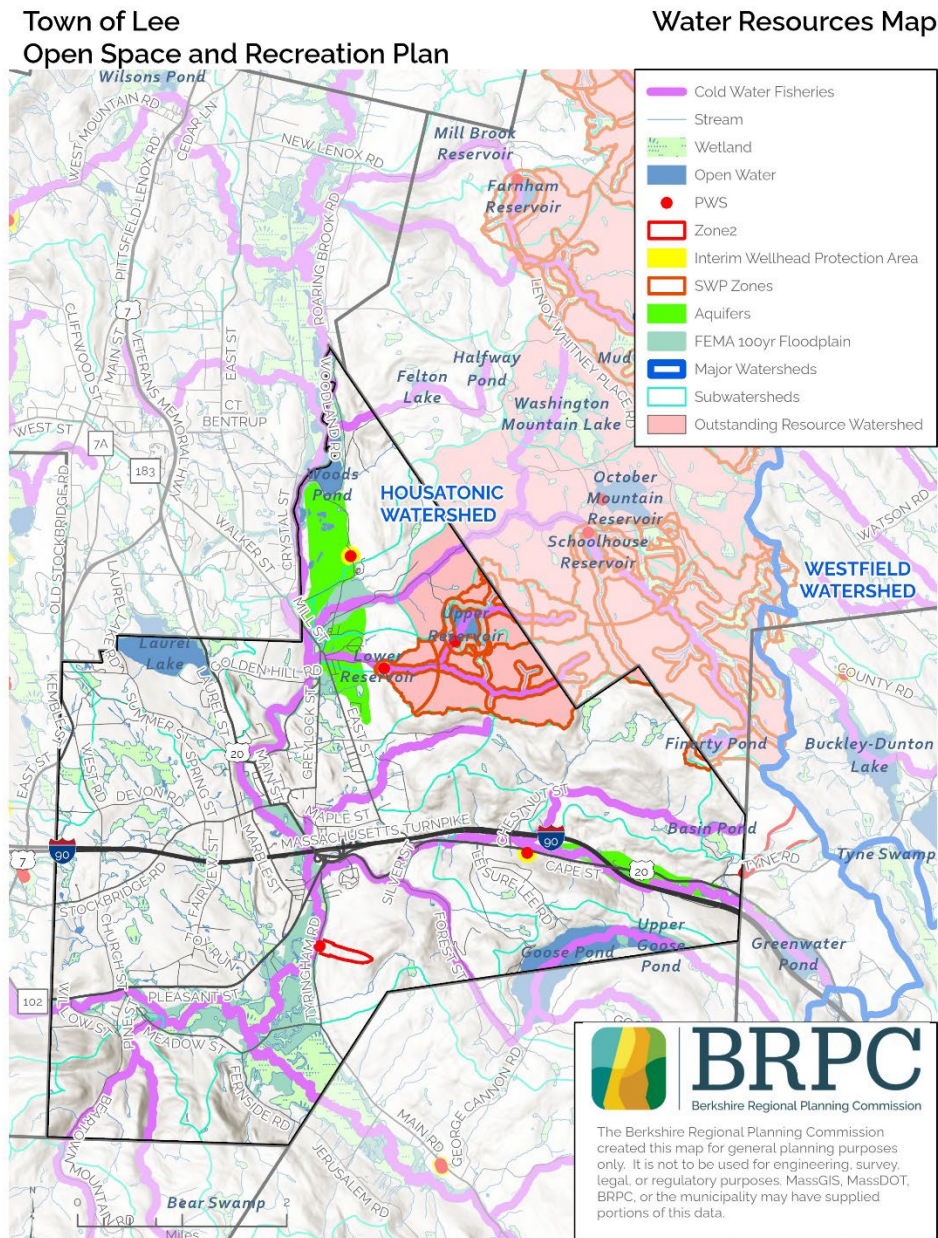
Surface Water

Surface water resources play an extremely important role in the Town of Lee, both from the standpoint of recreational value and economic usefulness. Approximately 561 acres of land in Lee are categorized as open water, which is 3% of the total land area. These figures do not calculate the many miles of rivers and streams that flow throughout the Town, providing freshwater habitats for wildlife and outdoor recreational enjoyment.

The Housatonic River, which flows through the middle of the town, and Laurel Lake, accessible from Route 20, are the most prominent water bodies known and used by local residents. The Wetlands Protection Act gives some protection to the wetlands and rivers of the state. The goals of the act are to preserve water quality, maintain drinking water quality and quantity, provide recharge through

infiltration, retain natural flood storage, sustain fisheries, and protect wildlife habitat. To attain these goals, development within 100 feet of wetlands and 200 feet of rivers is regulated by the Lee Conservation Commission. The Lee Scenic Mountain Act provides additional protection to these resources where steep slopes may be prone to erosion from tree removal or construction activities.

Figure 11 Water Resources Map



The Housatonic River Watershed is the largest in Berkshire County, encompassing 320,145 acres across 26 communities. The river dominates the center of Lee and is the final destination for most of the streams that flow through the town. Recreational use of the Housatonic River is limited by water quality problems associated with PCB contamination caused by the General Electric Company (GE) (see Environmental Challenges). In 2020 the U.S. EPA issued its Final RCRA Permit, which dictated how GE will conduct the cleanup. The cleanup effort is currently underway, with construction beginning in Pittsfield with an October 2000 consent decree and moving downstream south to Great Barrington. With work in the Lee/Lenox area in the coming years, construction is estimated to take at least 13 years after all appeals have been settled.

The river is used for canoeing as well as other forms of scenic enjoyment. The stretch of river between the Decker Canoe Launch in Lenox and the Woods Pond Launch is extremely popular for canoers/kayakers because of the meandering channel, easy paddling and the lack of dams. The Housatonic Valley Association, a watershed organization, has been successful in creating new canoe put ins along the river in recent years, including one at the popular Lee Athletic Field. The Town of Lee is also incorporating a greater role for the riverfront in its downtown planning and implementation efforts, including a river walk trail and a bike/walking trail. The river is also a favorite for local anglers, particularly Woods Pond and the Catch & Release section of river between the Rt 20 bridge and the Stockbridge town line.

Ponds and lakes are also an important element of Lee's water resource inventory. The most significant of these is Laurel Lake, a 170-acre great pond shared with the Town of Lenox. This facility includes a town beach (Sandy Beach) on the south side for Lee residents, and a town beach on the north shore for Lenox residents. It also has a state-run public boat ramp along Route 20. An annual three-foot drawdown is conducted at Laurel Lake along with a selective hand-pulling of invasive aquatic plants. Since 2010-11 Water Resources Services, on behalf of the Laurel Lake Preservation Association, has been conducting annual studies to determine the most beneficial lake management activities.

Another asset is Goose Pond, a 225-acre water body split into Upper and Lower ponds, which straddles the Lee/Tyringham border. This pond is unusual in that it is a cold-water lake with extremely clear water with a transparency of more than 15 feet. Lower Goose Pond can be accessed via a public boat ramp located on its southern tip from Goose Pond Road off Route 20. While Laurel Lake is a visible easy lake to access, Goose Pond is a hidden gem. Upper Goose Pond is difficult to access with a steep rocky shoreline and no formal trails. It is managed by The Trustees of Reservation (The Trustees) as a wilderness area with a ¼ mile of rocky shoreline that rises nearly 300 feet to a ridge top at 1,753 feet. The Appalachian Trail runs adjacent to The Trustees' property. Lee Land Trust was gifted land for Donato's Trail on Route 20 that provides a 2-mile loop trail to the ridge.

Woods Pond, a dammed section of the Housatonic River, is another waterbody that provides residents with the opportunity to paddle, fish, hunt waterfowl and view wildlife. The pond is famous for large carp and for viewing herons, bald eagles and various duck species.

Aquifer Recharge Areas

The Town of Lee relies almost entirely on surface water supplies as a source of public water. The reservoirs and the new water treatment plant have improved the quality of water and doubled the quantity of water available to the town. Although the Town does not currently rely heavily on ground water as a source of drinking water, hydro-geological explorations have been performed in the town to identify potential subsurface supplies. A study indicated that development of available groundwater supplies remains a possibility for the future.

There are two major aquifers in the town of Lee: the Woods Pond/October Mountain Aquifer and the Greenwater Pond Brook Aquifer. Although each of these aquifers is capable of producing significant quantities of water, each also suffers from water quality problems. The Woods Pond Aquifer currently yields more than two million gallons of water per day to four wells operated by a local industry used exclusively in industrial processing. The Greenwater Pond Brook Aquifer, though not currently being used as a public water supply, does serve a number of private users who have drilled wells in the deposits along Route 20. Test wells drilled in the Greenwater Pond Brook aquifer have projected an estimated capacity of up to one million gallons of water per day although sodium levels are high because of the proximity of the Massachusetts Turnpike. Because the town's existing reservoirs have sufficient capacity, no effort has been made to make use of either aquifer.

Flood Hazard Areas

Flood hazards have always been a major concern of the inhabitants of the Town of Lee. As a result of its location in the Housatonic River Basin, at the base of many major mountain streams, the Town has on several occasions suffered substantial losses due to flooding. Areas in East Lee have been regularly flooded and in one instance experienced significant loss of life.

According to the *Lee Hazard Mitigation Plan (2012)* the FIRM flood hazard area maps indicate that there are a total of 1,966 acres of 100-year floodplain within the town. This amounts to 11.4% of the total town. Many of these areas are occasionally flooded. The last major flood occurred in 1968 in East Lee. Several of the town parks and athletic fields are located in the floodplain and other wet areas which sometimes restrict recreational use and availability. The Meadow Farm composting facility on Tyringham Road is about 1.5 miles south of Big Y and is outside the floodway. It should be noted that the FIRM maps were developed in the 1980, and flood area boundaries have likely changed since this time.

In the northern section of town, flood hazards are minimal because the floodplain is contained within high banks where there is little or no housing. In the southern flatlands, however, the floodplain widens out as the Housatonic River enters areas of flatter topography, which unfortunately, are among the more developed sections of town. Areas particularly prone to flooding in this area include the southern end of Main Street, along Route 20 to the Massachusetts Turnpike, the northern part of Tyringham Road for about 2,000 feet, and a three mile stretch along Route 102 where significant residential and

commercial/industrial development has already occurred. The broad floodplain area near Meadow Street is largely in agricultural use and the wetlands are a major attraction for wildlife, including many species of migratory birds. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) has recognized the value of this resource by acquiring over 340 acres of land in this area. These acquisitions serve the dual purpose of protecting an important wildlife habitat and providing flood storage for the river basin.

Wetlands

Wetlands in their natural state were often considered undesirable and unsuitable for many types of development and, in the past, were commonly altered by draining or filling and then used for many human activities. This practice is now recognized as damaging to the environment and can occur in Lee under the jurisdiction of the Wetlands Protection Act as authorized by the Conservation Commission. In the last several decades, the variety of wetland values has been formerly recognized by the Wetlands Protection Act. Some of the values include wildlife, outdoor recreation, purification of aquifer recharge areas, flood control (stabilization of runoff), reduction and prevention of erosion, and scenic qualities.

According to MassGIS data 1,154 acres of land (7%) have been categorized as wetland resources, including emergent, scrub/shrub and forested wetland ecosystems. This percentage is relatively low for a Berkshire County valley town. This data captures the larger wetlands and does not include the smaller wetlands that exist throughout the town near or within other land uses. Scattered wetlands are found throughout the town with the greatest concentrations in the western portion from Route 102 northward to Summer Street. Notable wetlands are found in the following areas: north and south of Devon Road, along and to the south of Route 102, along the Massachusetts Turnpike, between Greylock Street and East Street, along Washington Mountain Road, north of Woods Pond, along the railroad tracks near the Lenox town border, south of the quarry, slightly west of Finnerty Pond, and just south of Basin Pond. Most of these wetlands are in wooded areas although some are in fields.

The most extensive area of wetlands in town is the flat floodplain north and south of Meadow Street. Much of this land is still being farmed. As has been pointed out, a concerted effort has been made by the State Fisheries and Wildlife to protect this important wetland.

Vegetation

The Town of Lee is extremely fortunate in having a large percentage of its land mass covered by some form of vegetation, much of it protected through either public ownership or state law. Included are a wide variety of plant communities. Fields and croplands are found in the northwestern part of town and extend the length of the Housatonic River from Woods Pond to South Lee along a narrow strip of the Massachusetts Turnpike, and into the broad flat lands of the Hop Brook area. Hemlock-Northern Hardwoods are found in the mountainous southwestern section of town in much of the eastern highlands, and small scattered areas in the western end of town. White and red pine softwood forest is found in a broad north-south band on the eastern side of town in the uppermost elevations. Flood plains, swamps and marshes are found in scattered pockets in the western part of town, and a large area is found in the Hop Brook region.

Forest Land

Approximately 12,094 acres (70%) of the town is forested, which makes it the most prevalent land use in the town. This figure includes both upland and wetland forest types. Notable red pine stands surrounding Laurel Lake and near the lake's Rt. 20 causeway area and should be protected. The town's forests are an important outdoor recreational asset. Large blocks of protected forest lands are owned by the Town of Lee, DCR, DFW and BNRC. An additional 1,559 acres of forest land is enrolled in the Chapter 61 Tax Abatement Program. Lee forests provide wildlife habitat and trail systems that provide outdoor recreational opportunities such as hiking, hunting, mountain biking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, motorcycle and ATV riding.

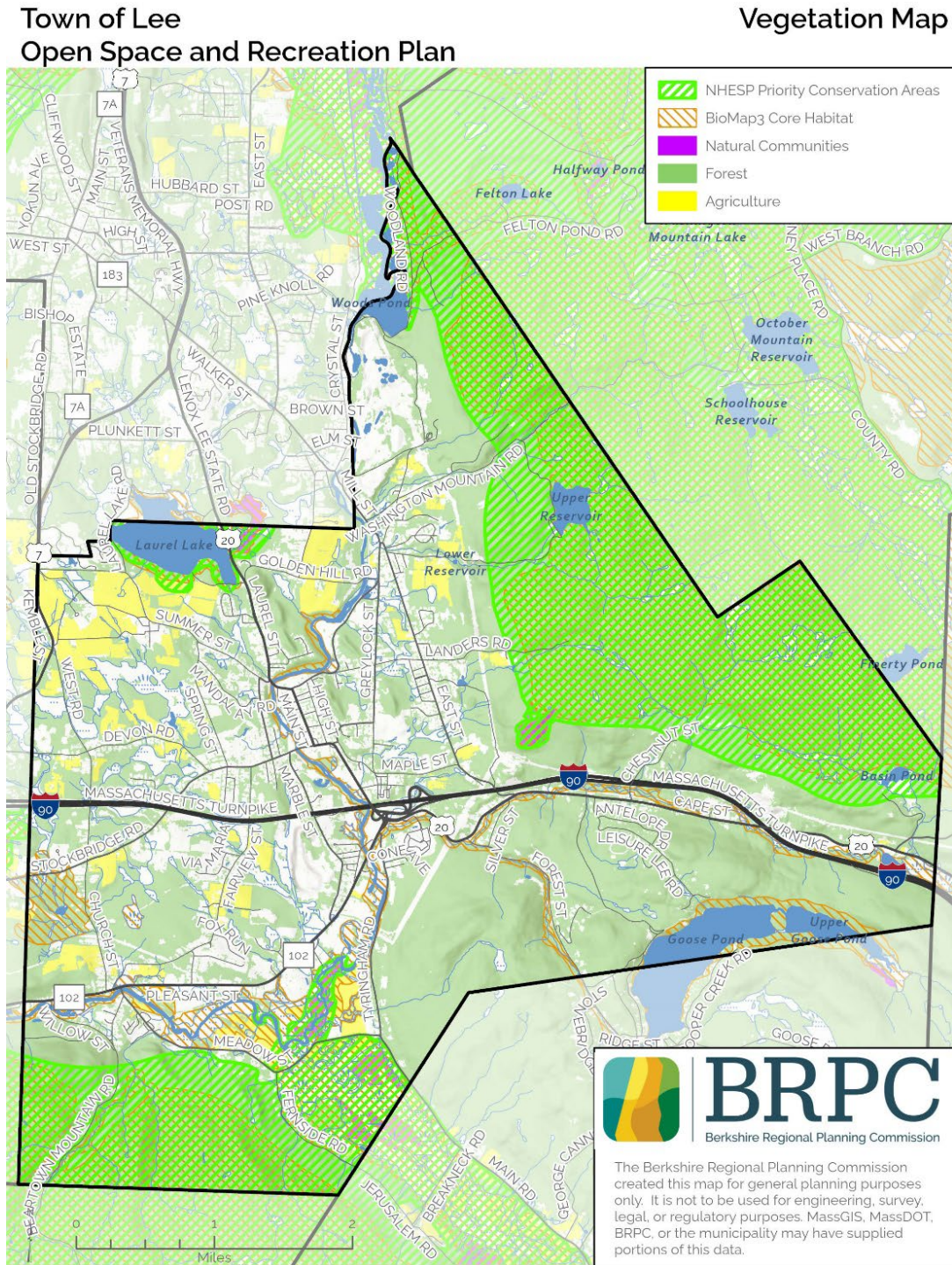
Public shade trees as defined by Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 87 are those located within the public right of way. Trees within the right of way are protected from being removed without a public review process that involves the town's tree warden. Unauthorized removal of such trees are punishable by fines or other penalties. There is a remarkable elm tree located on Stockbridge Road that is thought by some residents to be one of the largest elms in the county, possibly second or third in size after the state's Champion Elm in Lanesborough. This elm in the vicinity of 203 Stockbridge Road, is likely in the town's right-of-way. A blight-resistant elm was planted at Sandy Beach in 2010 and has prospered for five years. The town has enacted both the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act and a scenic road ordinance.

Agricultural Land

According to MassGIS land use data, 1,240 acres of land in Lee are in crop, hay, or pastureland use, or are kept open field, for a total of 10% of the total land cover in the town. Although High Lawn Farm is the most visible agricultural site in the town, several other properties support agricultural uses, including the Leahey Dairy Farm located below October Mountain. Local agriculture not only provides the community with a local source of produce, meat, and other foods, but also often provides scenic landscapes and

wildlife habitat. Lee farms provide a pastoral foreground that contrasts with a forested hillside background.

Figure 12 Vegetation Map



Only three of the town's farms, the Courser Brook Farm, LaFattoria and Bartini lands, are permanently protected through Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs), totaling 267 acres among them. Approximately 1,963 acres of agricultural lands are enlisted in the Chapter 61A Tax Program, along with four privately owned farms that are 100 acres or more in size. Some of the lands under the Ch. 61A program are currently forested, wetlands or open land but are associated with working farms. This explains why there is more acreage enlisted under Chapter 61A than there is total pasture and crop land calculated by MassGIS (See the land use section). The Chapter 61A program, like the Chapter 61 Forestry Program, is a temporary program. If the land changes use, the owner must pay back the taxes saved under the program and offer the Town of Lee the right of first refusal.

High Lawn Farm, located in the northwestern portion of the town, is the largest area comprising of 1,500 acres between Lee and Stockbridge. Of these, 755 acres of this are in Lee. Some portion of High Lawn land is forested, but much of the land is in active agricultural production. The land has been farmed since the mid-1800's, but the farm began in 1887 when W.D. Sloane purchased the first 180 acres. A summer villa and several iconic farm buildings were erected in the early decades of the 20th century, and throughout the 1920s - 1970s descendants of the Sloane family purchased additional land and created a large modern dairy farm, establishing a Jersey cow herd whose lineage is internationally recognized. By the mid-1930s the farm had 25 families working and residing on the farm. The recognizable yellow buildings scattered across the farm are some of the residential housing offered on the farm. The Master Breeder Award from the American Jersey Cattle Association was awarded to Colonel Wilde in 1960 and to Mrs. Wilde in 1977 making them the first couple to ever receive the award in separate years. The property fell into disrepair in the 1980-1990's but is experiencing a renaissance with the restoration and reuse of the original farm buildings, erection of new barns with modern milking equipment, and extensive fencing of its acreage and replacement of aging trees. The owner's goal is to return it to a model farm of the 19th century by removing architecturally irrelevant out-buildings and reducing the use of motorized vehicles on the property. High Lawn Farm recently purchased adjacent lands in Stockbridge along Bean Hill Road. Today the farm is one of the largest and last-remaining intact family farms in Massachusetts.

Rare Plant Species

Lee is home to a number of rare plant species some of which are threatened by the lack of a formal protective strategy. According to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program, there are currently 11 listed plant species of concern that are found within the town. Many of these species are found in wetlands or moist soils, making the protection of wetlands even more important. Andrews' bottle gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) inhabits moist meadows and shrub thickets bordering streams, rivers, and isolated wetlands on limestone-derived soils. Hairy honeysuckle is found in open to lightly shaded exposures on calcareous rocky slopes or acidic slopes with calcareous till. Slender blue-eyed grass is found in calcium-rich wetland habitats. Current sites in the state include a wet meadow, open alkaline seepage fen, and a shallow roadside ditch. The known state-wide distribution of these three endangered species are only

found within a few towns within Berkshire County. Although common, spring beauty flowers are found in forests in the town, harboring the arrival of spring.

Table 2. Plant Species of Concern

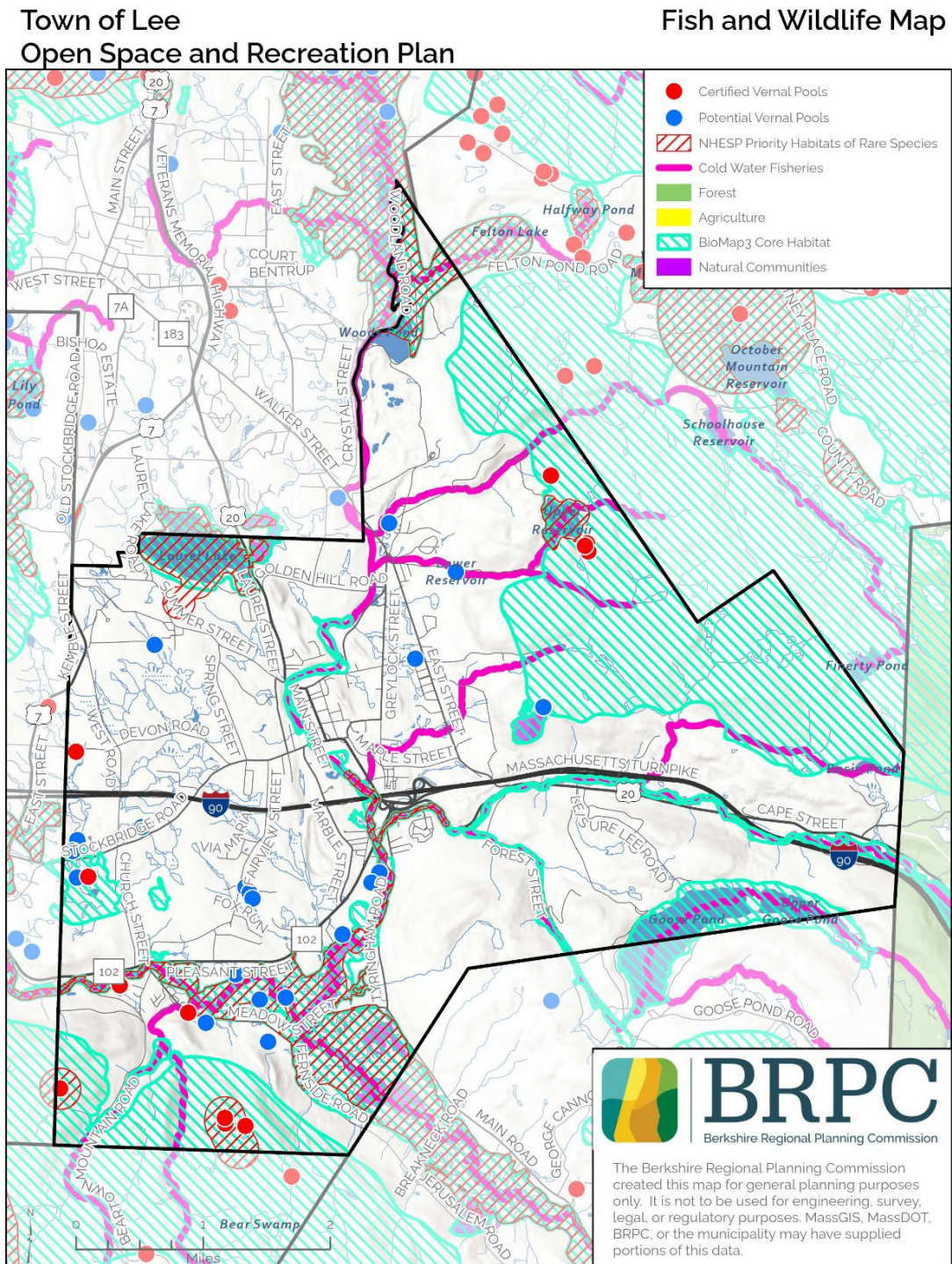
Common Name	Scientific Name	MESA Status	Most Recent Observation
Andrews' Bottle Gentian	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>	Endangered	2012
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Special Concern	2008
Dwarf Scouring Rush	<i>Equisetum scirpoides</i>	Special Concern	1915
Fen Sedge	<i>Carex tetanica</i>	Special Concern	1999
Frank's Lovegrass	<i>Eragrostis frankii</i>	Special Concern	2008
Hairy Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera hirsuta</i>	Endangered	2019
Hemlock-parsley	<i>Conioselinum chinense</i>	Special Concern	1982
Labrador Bedstraw	<i>Galium labradoricum</i>	Threatened	1999
Matted Spike-sedge	<i>Eleocharis intermedia</i>	Threatened	2008
Pale Green Orchid	<i>Platanthera flava var. herbiola</i>	Threatened	2013
Slender Blue-eyed Grass	<i>Sisyrinchium mucronatum</i>	Endangered	1912

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>; downloaded 6-7-23.

Fisheries and Wildlife

The Town of Lee provides a diversity of wildlife habitat in its vast forests, its wetlands, and in its open lands of meadows and pastures that cover the landscape. Particularly good publicly owned wildlife habitat is located in the 16,500-acre October Mountain State Forest, the 12,000 -acre Beartown Mountain State Forest, the 425-acre Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area and the Housatonic River corridor.

Figure 13 Fish and Wildlife Map



In the numerous ponds, lakes, streams, and wetlands of Lee many species of waterfowl flourish. The Housatonic River, in particular, provides an important corridor for migratory birds. Some that are known to nest in the county are the Canada Goose, mallard, the black and wood ducks, hooded merganser, pied-billed grebe, blue winged teal, common gallinule, Virginia rail, sora rail, American bittern, and the great blue, green and black-crowned night herons. Bald eagles nest along Laurel Lake and are frequent visitors along the Housatonic River corridor. Large tracts of wetlands owned and operated by the DFW as wildlife management areas in the Woods Pond and Meadow Street areas provide particularly good opportunities for wetland wildlife. Meadowlarks and Bobolinks, species that need open wild fields to breed, are supported in the Edith Wharton Conservation Area

Fishing opportunities are also abundant in Lee's lakes and ponds and in the numerous streams that feed the Housatonic River. The fish species include rainbow, brown and brook trout, creek chub, banded killifish, blacknose and longnose dace, yellow and brown bullheads, and slimy sculpin. They also include smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, rock bass, bluegill, chain pickerel, northern pike, emerald shiner, yellow and white perch, carp and white and longnose suckers. The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) annually stocks trout in Beartown, Hop, West Brooks, the Housatonic River, Laurel Lake, and Goose Pond. Stocking is also done in October Mountain State Park. There is a popular Catch & Release area on the Housatonic River between the Rt 20 bridge and the Stockbridge town line. Because of PCB contamination it is not possible to eat any fish taken from the Housatonic River.

Large tracts of woodland, particularly in the October Mountain and Beartown State Forests, provide excellent protected habitats for many species of common animals. There are both older, mature forests and new growth forests in the area for upland birds and songbirds who require dense interior forest and those who need younger forests and edge habitats to breed successfully. The upper reaches of the Housatonic River corridor, as it flows through Lenox and Lee, is part of an Important Bird Area as designated by Massachusetts Audubon, providing breeding habitat for a vast variety of bird species.³ Commonly observed organisms include beaver, muskrats, otter, bobcat, fisher, coyote, porcupine, and snowshoe hare. White-tailed deer, turkeys, black bears, ruffed grouse, coyote, rabbits, and gray squirrels are hunted and harvested annually in Lee. The DFW and the Lee Sportsmen's Club annually stock hundreds of ring-necked pheasants in the area.

Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are small, seasonal wetlands that provide important wildlife habitat, especially for amphibians and invertebrate animals that use them to breed. Vernal pools are indispensable to biodiversity, both locally and globally. For a species with a narrow or small distribution, a specific vernal pool may be the only place in the region or on earth that the creature is found. Because many of the region's rarest amphibians rely completely on vernal pools, it is important to identify vernal pools and

³ <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/birds-wildlife/bird-conservation-research/massachusetts-important-bird-areas/iba-sites/upper-housatonic-valley#:~:text=Site%20Description,remaining%20in%20central%20Berkshire%20County>.

prioritize those known to support rare species for protection. The most effective way to protect vernal pools is to study and certify them.

There are currently 13 certified vernal pools, and another identified 20 potential vernal pools. Lee is noted by Mass Wildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) as having a few clusters of certified and potential vernal pools in the same general area. These clusters are particularly valuable habitat for the species that rely solely on vernal pools to breed, as a nearby pool can provide alternate habitat should one pool dry up or is otherwise diminished for use. Vernal pool clusters are found most predominantly in the southwest portion of the town.

Corridors for Wildlife Migration

Centrally located in Berkshire County, Lee plays an important role in maintaining connectivity for wildlife in the area. The town is surrounded by large areas of State managed forest and wildlife management areas. To the southwest, the Kamposoa Fen Wildlife Management Area offers 72 acres of swamp and managed agricultural land for fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. The area is part of a larger drainage system of 1,350 acres and provides habitat for 19 state listed rare species and has been identified as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

To the southeast, Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area is a seasonally flooded meadowland along the Housatonic River. The property consists of 425 acres of land shared between Lee and nearby Tyringham. The area is stocked with pheasant and provides open water for migrating waterfowl.

To the south, Beartown State Forest offers 12,000 acres of Department of Conservation and Recreation land for habitat and recreation. The property overlaps several municipalities in the county including Great Barrington, Tyringham, Lee, and Monterey. The property is mostly deciduous forest with areas of old growth including eastern hemlock, northern red oak, eastern white pine, and sweet and yellow birch.

To the east, the October Mountain State Forest is more than 16,000 acres of forest and the largest state forest in the state. The property is shared with nearby Becket, Lenox, and Washington. The property is part of the Hoosac Range that separates the Housatonic River Valley from the hill towns to the east. The park features several prominent peaks including October Mountain and Washington Mountain.

Flowing into the town from Lenox to the north and out to Stockbridge in the southwest, the Housatonic River Corridor stretches for 149 miles. The river flows from Pittsfield in northern Berkshire County, through Connecticut and into the Long Island Sound. The river is designated a National Wild and Scenic River in Connecticut and in important cold-water fishery by the state of Massachusetts. The river and associated riparian ecosystem provides habitat for migrating fish and birds as well as terrestrial organisms that use the corridor to move between habitats.

Rare Animal Species

The state’s Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) maintains a list of all documented rare species of animals within each municipality, including the endangered status of each species and the date of the most recent observation in a town. Because the animals are rare, many listed species are difficult to detect even when they are present. The fact that the 'Most Recent Observation' recorded for a species may be several years old should not be interpreted as meaning that the species no longer occurs in a town. As of June 2023, NHESP listed 16 animal species of concern as occurring in the Town of Lee. Separately Mass Wildlife also lists nine species of bats that live within Massachusetts, of which five are listed as endangered. The bat listings are largely due to the devastating impact that the White-nose Syndrome has had on their populations.

Table 3. Animal Species of Concern

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Observation
Eastern small-footed bat*	<i>Myotis leibii</i>	Mammal	Endangered	NA
Indiana bat*	<i>Myotis sodalis</i>	Mammal	Endangered	NA
Little brown bat*	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Mammal	Endangered	NA
Northern long-eared bat*	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Mammal	Endangered	NA
Tricolored bat*	<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>	Mammal	Endangered	NA
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Bird	Endangered	2009
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Bird	Threatened	2019
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	Bird	Special Concern (SC)	1999
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	Bird	SC	2013
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	Bird	Threatened	1999
Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Reptile	SC	1999
Jefferson Salamander (complex)	<i>Ambystoma jeffersonianum</i>	Amphibian	SC	2013
Bridle Shiner	<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Fish	SC	2010
Longnose Sucker	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Fish	SC	2014
Creeper	<i>Strophitus undulatus</i>	Mussel	SC	2008
Boreal Marstonia	<i>Marstonia lustrica</i>	Snail	Endangered	2012
Dion Skipper	<i>Euphyes dion</i>	Butterfly/Moth	Threatened	2009
Mustard White	<i>Pieris oleracea</i>	Butterfly/Moth	Threatened	2009
Ostrich Fern Borer	<i>Papaipema sp. 2</i>	Butterfly/Moth	SC	2009
Tule Bluet	<i>Enallagma carunculatum</i>	Dragonfly/Damselfly	SC	1976
Twelve-spotted Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela duodecimguttata</i>	Beetle	SC	2013

Source for most species: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>; downloaded 6-7-23

Source for bat species: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/bats-of-massachusetts>; downloaded 6-7-23

The Eastern small-footed bat and the Indiana bat have been documented as being found only in Berkshire and Hampden Counties. Like the plant species of concern, the majority of animal species require water or wetland habitats for all cycles of life or for breeding. Aside from the bat species, the two endangered species are the American Bittern, which requires open marsh habitat dominated by tall emergent vegetation, and the Boreal Marstonia snail, which requires cold, calcium-rich lake waters.

BioMap3

The Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game, through the NHESP and The Nature Conservancy’s Massachusetts Program to develop BioMap 3 is an important tool to guide strategic protection and stewardship of lands and waters that are most important for conserving biological diversity in Massachusetts.

The latest version of BioMap3 combines more than 40 years of rigorously documented rare species and natural community records from Mass Wildlife with cutting-edge climate resilience data from The Nature Conservancy and spatial data identifying intact fish and wildlife communities, habitats, and ecosystems that are the focus of the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan. The new BioMap3 Core Habitat areas are generally the same as was shown in BioMap2, except for the addition of three new areas. A 147-acre area around Stockbridge Road and Church Street has been noted as a potential vernal pool Core Habitat area, and a 13-acre area east of this has been added as a wetland Core Habitat area. Also, the aquatic Core Habitat area along Greenwater Brook has been extended eastward to include a wetland habitat known to support rare bird breeding habitat.

Protection and stewardship of BioMap3 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape is essential to safeguard the diversity of species and their habitats, intact ecosystems, and resilient natural landscapes across Massachusetts. According to the BioMap2 Town Report, drafted in 2012, Lee lies on the border of the Berkshire Highlands/Southern Green Mountains, the Lower Berkshire Hills, and the Western New England Marble Valleys/Berkshire Valley/Housatonic and Hoosic Valley Ecoregions. The Berkshire Highlands Ecoregion is an area drained by the Deerfield, upper Westfield, Hoosic, and Housatonic Rivers. Lakes and ponds are relatively abundant. This ecoregion has deep soils that support northern hardwoods and spruce-fir forests. The Lower Berkshire Hills Ecoregion is similar to the Berkshire Highlands

Lee at a Glance

BioMap3 Core Habitat: 5,476.5 acres

BioMap3 Core Habitat Protected: 3,758.8 acres or 21.7%

BioMap3 Critical Natural Landscape: 8,437.7 acres

BioMap3 Critical Natural Landscape Protected: 4,943.2 acres or 28.6%.

BioMap3 Components

Core Habitat

Exemplary or Priority Natural

Community Cores

Forest Cores-3,324 acres

Wetland Cores- 534.3 acres

Aquatic Cores- 1,711.2 acres

*5 Endangered Species listed in Lee***

1 birds, 1 snail, 3 plants

Critical Natural Landscape

Landscape Blocks- 6,434.8 acres

Wetland Core Buffers-534.6 acres

Aquatic Core Buffers- 1,689.8

acres

*** See BioMap3 Town Report*

Appendix X for complete list of species

Ecoregion, with its common northern hardwoods, but it lacks spruce-fir and harbors transition hardwoods. Lakes and ponds are relatively abundant. The Western New England Marble Valleys Ecoregion is an area drained by the Hoosic and Housatonic Rivers. This ecoregion harbors farms, evergreen forests, transition and northern hardwood forests, and calcareous fens. The limestone-rich bedrock in the area creates alkaline lakes and streams.

In addition, NHESP created an additional strategic planning series for all communities located within the Housatonic River Watershed in 2011 which provides guidance on where local and state conservation efforts should be focused for greater biodiversity protection. The highest priority conservation areas that have been identified and delineated during this effort are shown as Priority Conservation Areas on the Unique Features Map (Figure 13.) In Lee, efforts to expand conserved lands around Laurel Lake, October Mountain, Beartown Mountain and the Hop Brook watershed have been delineated. Many of these areas expand out beyond Lee's borders, which shows the importance of working with conservation efforts occurring in neighboring communities.

Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

Unique Natural Resources

The Town of Lee has several areas that contain unique or uncommon natural resources or that provide outstanding scenic qualities. In 1981 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts conducted a statewide survey of the state to identify large landscapes of superior scenic qualities. Two areas in Lee were noted in this survey: 1) High Lawn Farm along Summer Street, Route 7 and extending into Lenox and Stockbridge, and 2) the scenic vistas that can be seen along Route 102 and Tyringham Road, extending into Stockbridge and Tyringham. Although commercial development along the Route 102 corridor has diminished the scenic qualities of some sections of this road, the long-range views of Beartown Mountain remain striking. Lee is partly located in an ecological area known as the Western New England Marble Valley. It is this calcareous bedrock that has made the town's marble and limestone industries so successful. Since rock formations including calcium-based marble are geologically different from the rest of the state, the chemistry of the water and soil of the area are also distinct. Vegetation growing on these soils is distinct, with many species that occur only in calcium-rich areas. Some of these species are under state protection because they are so uncommon in the state. The wetland vegetation in particular is different from most of the rest of New England, with an abundance of species that are specialized to calcium enriched, but otherwise nutrient poor, waters. Lee has several occurrences of calcareous fens, a riverside marsh and calcareous ledge in priority habitats.

A portion of the 1,350 acre Kamposoa Bog Drainage Basin Area (224) of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is located in the town of Lee with the majority of the drainage basin located in Stockbridge (1,125 acres). The Kamposoa drainage basin is part of the larger Housatonic River watershed. The heart of the ACEC is Kamposoa Bog and its associated surface waters, wetlands, groundwater and rare species habitat. Scientifically, Kamposoa is not a bog, but a fen, contained in a small basin (the Kamposoa drainage

basin), with an inflow of calcareous cold groundwater. Scientists refer to Kampoosa Bog technically as a Lake Basin Graminoid (grass-like) Calcareous Fen. Due to the critical ecological importance of surface and ground water to the fen and the high concentration of rare species found there, the boundary of the ACEC is designed to approximate the sub-drainage basin of Kampoosa Bog.

The Kampoosa Bog ACEC contains one of the Commonwealth's most significant rare species habitats. The fen and adjacent areas within the ACEC provide habitat for at least 19 state-listed rare species within a relatively small area of 1,350 acres. According to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Kampoosa Bog supports not only a very high number of state-listed rare species, but also provides habitat for several rare species that are found at very few other sites in Massachusetts. According to the Natural Heritage Program, "preserving the integrity of this calcareous fen is critical to maintaining one of the premier rare species sites in Massachusetts." The Nature Conservancy has given Kampoosa a global ranking in terms of its significance, which means species found here are imperiled throughout their ranges. These organisms are highly vulnerable to extinction and require "the highest priority for protection."

Highly significant archaeological resources are also located within the ACEC which was determined by the Massachusetts Historical Commission as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Following ACEC designation, the Kampoosa Stewardship Committee was formed by a variety of local, regional, and state private and public agencies/organizations, as well as interested citizens to preserve and restore the resources of the ACEC by fostering community stewardship.

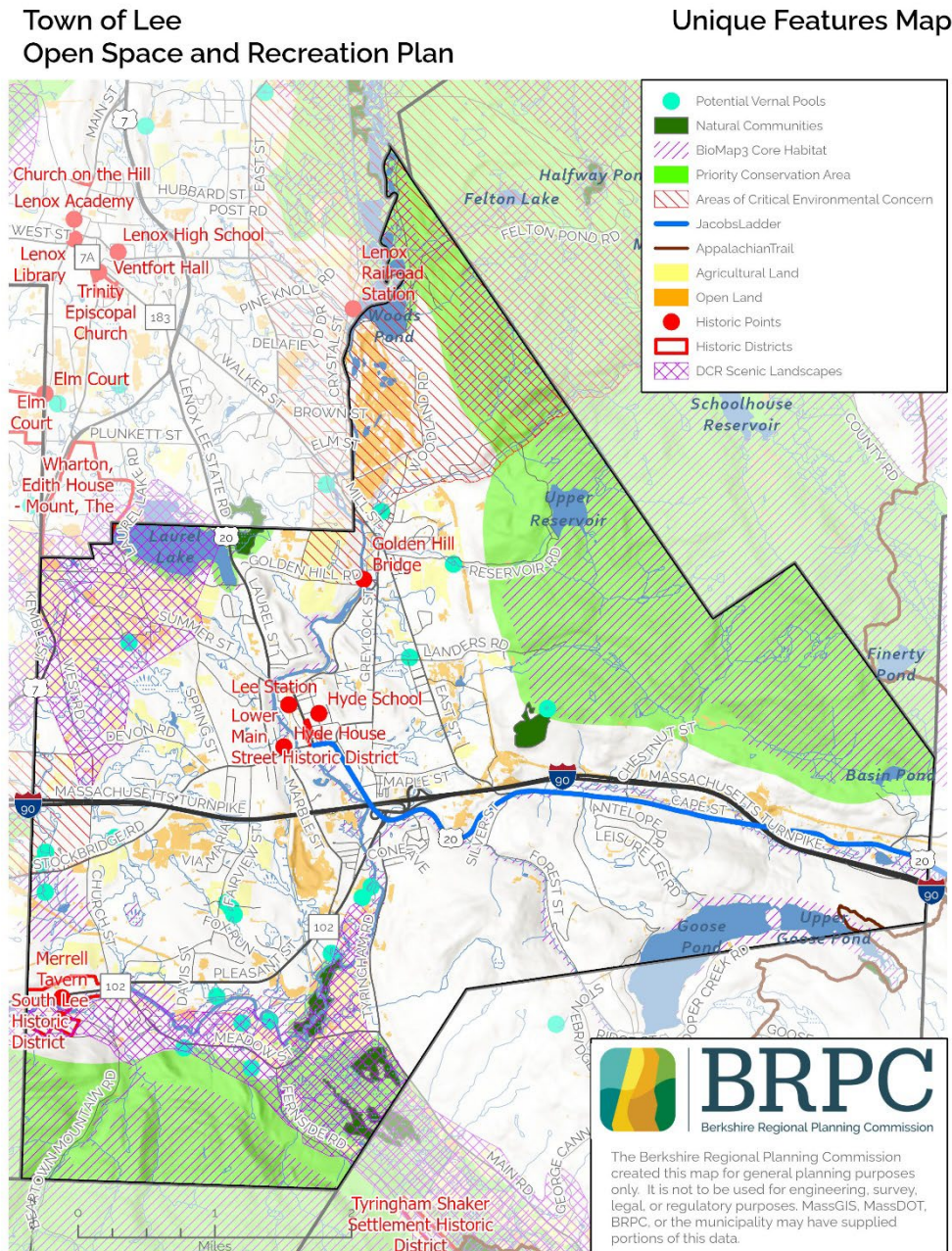
A second ACEC, the Upper Housatonic River ACEC, is in the northern portion of the Town. This ACEC, designated in 2009, encompasses a total of 12,280 acres, extending across portions of Pittsfield, Washington, Lenox and Lee. The boundaries generally follow a 13-mile corridor of the Housatonic River and its supporting watersheds, from southern Pittsfield to the northern portion of Lee. This section of the river includes a complex ecosystem, hosting the river, adjacent wetlands and floodplain forests, several cold-water fisheries, rare species habitat and steep forested slopes of October Mountain State Forest. As noted on the ACEC website, the regionally significant biodiversity and wildlife habitat in the designated area is indicated by the exceptional number of rare species (32), Certified and Potential Vernal Pools (43), and the combined total of 11,405 acres or 93% of the area delineated as viable habitat by the DFW's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Of this total, 7,869 acres (64%) of the ACEC is designated as BioMap Core Habitat and Supporting Natural Landscapes, 3,536 acres (29%) as Living Waters Core Habitat and Critical Supporting Watershed. Regulated areas of rare species Priority Habitats and Estimated Habitats total 3,130 acres or 25% of the ACEC with the majority of these acres included in the BioMap and Living Waters areas. Approximately 1,614 of the ACEC is in Lee extending from the state forest east of the Woods Pond and backwater areas of the river southward to the cove pond area in the vicinity of Columbia and Greylock Streets, and it includes the Coddington Brook and Washington Mountain Brook watersheds.

The ACEC locations are found in Figure 13.

As noted by NHESP, several Priority Natural Plant Communities occur in Lee, most of which are associated with the outstanding riverine and wetland resources. These communities have been ranked

to reflect each one's rarity and level of threat. The table "Town of Lee List of Priority Natural Communities," below lists these unusual resources with their designation of rarity. The locations of these communities are shown on Map F: Vegetation and Fisheries & Wildlife. Many are shared between the neighboring communities of Lenox, Washington, Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Tyringham.

Figure 14 Unique Features Map



Management and monitoring of conservation lands become important as acquisition and protection are accomplished. Water quality and quantity are ongoing issues for wetlands. All wetlands particularly need to maintain their natural water regime, including normal fluctuations and connections with uplands and other wetlands. Another aspect of managing conservation lands that is important in many areas is controlling invasive non-native species that alter the habitat and occupy space that native species would otherwise use. Bush honeysuckle is a particular problem on several of the priority areas in Lee, with Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, and giant reed grass also colonizing large areas of many wetland communities.

Lee's character is defined by a series of scenic landscapes, cultural and historic areas, unusual geologic features and unique ecosystems. Lee is truly the Gateway to the Berkshires. Lee's Lower Main Street Historic District, anchored at its south end by the iconic Lee Congregational Church, bring us back to a typical 19th century New England commercial Main Street with its maintained historic buildings. In addition, the farms that surround the developed center remind us of our agricultural past.

Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway and Village of East Lee

Jacob's Ladder Trail on Route 20 is a state-designated scenic byway, a program that recognizes the unique resources along the byway corridor. The byway extends 35 miles among the towns of Lee, Becket, Chester, Huntington, and Russell. Historically, this was a major trading route from the Connecticut to the Hudson Rivers. It was also used during the Revolutionary War as a main supply route for troops from Boston to Fort Ticonderoga in New York.

During the scenic assessment that was conducted as part of the Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan, four sections of the byway were noted as being of High or Excellent Scenic Quality. One of them was the Becket-Greenwater Pond, segment on the Lee/Becket border. Lee's original settled area was in East Lee and encompasses an abandoned settlement called Dodgetown. Here in the 1750's lived the town's first inhabitants on a piece of land located on what is now Landers Road and Chestnut Street. East Lee is also the site of many of Lee's original industries, including Mountain Mill on Forest Street. East Lee is also where the Appalachian Trail crosses the scenic byway.

Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area & Beartown Mountain State Forest

This tract takes its name from the profusion of hop vines which once grew throughout all of South Lee and the Hop Brook Valley. Interestingly, the area belonged to Great Barrington from 1761 until 1777, when Lee was incorporated. Hop Brook Valley, the lowest point in Lee, is the site of Hop Brook and the Housatonic River. The unique wildlife populations of these two riverways, together with the sharp elevation change from Fernside (Beartown Mountain) into the lowlands, provide unparalleled biodiversity.

Golden Hill and the Pinnacle, Town Forest

This area extends from the edge of a meadowland south of Golden Hill Road and through a microclimate of hemlock, mixed forests, brooks, and glacial outcroppings of granitic gneiss until reaching

Route 20. Herein rises the Pinnacle, whose eastern vista embraces the former Shaylor Farm on Golden Hill and the dramatic expanse of October Mountain. Some of the heritage landscape along the eastern side of Golden Hill Road has been preserved through a conservation restriction. The Pinnacle's southern and western views encompass Monument Mountain in Great Barrington, High Lawn Farm and its landmark tower, Laurel Lake with its glimpse of "the Mount," the former estate of American writer Edith Wharton. Boundary stones in this area marked with the initials "G.W." recall that this land was a hunting preserve of the George Westinghouse Estate.

Glassworks Grant Area: Longcope Park and Devon Road

In the southwest part of town lies the ancient Glassworks Grant, which dates back to 1754. This includes Longcope Park, a town-owned tract of splendid coniferous trees and sparkling rivulets, as well as many scenic views east and south from Stockbridge Road. The Glassworks Grant, consisting of 1564 acres, was established to encourage the making of potash for use in the glassmaking industry of eastern Massachusetts, including the famous Sandwich Glass of Cape Cod. Northwest from Stockbridge Road runs Devon Road, a scenic location and also part of the grant. The town also owns a 171-acre site to the Northeast of the Longcope Preserve. Originally purchased for a town golf course, the parcel has been used for agriculture- primarily pastureland and hayfields. A proposed community center on the site did not garner sufficient community support and, as part of examining open spaces in the town, the town has undertaken an analysis of uses for this parcel. One outcome that has been initiated is to create a larger network of town owned parcels so that a more extensive trail network can be planned for the site. To this end, the town proposed and received approval at the 12/6/2023 Town Meeting to acquire 25-acres of open space from a nearby property owner, thereby linking three town owned parcels into a contiguous block of open space. Additionally, the town was able to transfer an unused barn on the site to a nearby property owner, removing responsibility for the structure and any concurrent liability. The Greenagers, a local trail crew of high school students, has worked to improve trails and stream crossings on the site.

Housatonic River

The Housatonic River as it flows along the base of October Mountain and south through the center of Town is one of the most scenic corridors in Lee. Shining in spring with abundant wildflowers, the area north of Woods Pond meanders and offers river oxbows and backwaters interspersed with seasonally flooded forests, shrub swamps, and open-water marshes. Abandoned agricultural fields and blueberry bushes line the river in many places. The slow-moving current, abundant wildlife, and wide riverbends make this section of the river one of the most beautiful and popular paddling locations in the region. The river as it flows through Lee and Lenox has been designated by Massachusetts Audubon as part of the Upper Housatonic Valley Important Bird Area due to the diversity of rare and uncommon bird and other animal species residing in or migrating along the river corridor. Bald eagles and osprey are often seen along the river and Woods Pond.

Laurel Lake/High Lawn Farm Scenic Area

Laurel Lake, dividing Lenox and Northwest Lee, creates a habitat containing century old white pines, hemlocks, and a naturally sandy cove called Sandy Beach. Visitors to the site can enjoy some of the most beautiful sunsets in the town of Lee. The southwest side of the lake is owned by High Lawn Farm, which is one of the oldest dairy farms in the northeast. It is one of the largest pieces of private land in Massachusetts, and its Teutonic farm tower and architecture render it incomparable. Especially spectacular is the vista east from Summer Street in Lee over Laurel Lake to October Mountain. Other scenic views of the farm are seen along Route 7 in the vicinity of Summer Street where the farmlands along the road are set at the base of Rattlesnake Hill.

Sandy Beach is used annually by the town with permission from High Lawn Farm's owners as a favorite recreation area for residents. It is unique for its view across the lake to an open meadow called Edith Wharton Park. This rolling expanse of field and deciduous trees is jointly owned and managed by the towns of Lenox and Lee and now being conveyed to Edith Wharton Park. This lake region figures in the cultural past of Lee and Lenox. Notable celebrities who spent considerable time at the lake include inventor George Westinghouse, actress Fanny Kemble and author Edith Wharton.

Ferncliff Reservation and Peter's Cave in Lee Proper

Within the urban limits of Lee lies Ferncliff, geologically known as a drumlin and one of a local series that formed glacially and include the aforementioned Pinnacle. Like the Pinnacle, Ferncliff consists of climax forests, sheer cliffs and glacial erratics.

On its south side, as a point of historical interest, lies Peter's Cave where insurrectionist Peter Wilcox hid during Shay's Rebellion in 1787. Because of the settling of boulders, the cave's interior is now largely considered impassable. Wilcox's cabin is now the site of the Lee Library. Ferncliff's most distinctive vista is to the south from historic Union Rock, a mound of feldspar located behind Crossway Village Senior Housing and the former Lee Central School. From there may be seen Lee's unique town spires, which are the most significant feature of the Lee Downtown Historic District set against the backdrop of Beartown Mountain.

Environmental Challenges

The Housatonic River is contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) released over several decades from the General Electric Company (GE) facility in Pittsfield. The presence of PCBs within the entire length of the river within Lee restricts full public use of this natural resource. GE has entered into a Consent Decree and subsequent final permit with the U.S. EPA to conduct cleanup activities within the river stretching from Pittsfield downstream through Great Barrington. Cleanup has been conducted on the first 1.5 miles of the river, and a 2020 Permit is now in effect for the next approximately 10 miles of "Rest of River," including several areas within the town of Lee. Total volume of sediment, bank, and

floodplain soil proposed to be removed from Rest of River is estimated to be 1.13 million cubic yards (cy), of which approximately 1 million cy will be disposed of in an Upland Disposal Facility (UDF), to be located in the former Lane Construction site in Lee. The cleanup is estimated to take 13 years to implement. The cost to GE to conduct the work is estimated to be in the range of \$576 million, which is substantially less than the previous 2016 Permit, which required all removed contaminated sediments/soils to be transported to PCB-permitted disposal facilities out of state.

According to the EPA's 2020 Permit, there are three segments ("Reaches") of Rest of River in Lee where cleanup will occur including river sections and backwaters upstream of Woods Pond (Reach 5C), Woods Pond itself (Reach 6), and the dam impoundments behind the Columbia, Eagle, and Willow mills (Reach 7). Specifically the Permit calls for these actions in Lee:

- Reach 5C: Removal of river sediment and backfill to achieve 1 mg/kg average PCBs.
- Reach 5 Backwaters: sediment removal and capping to achieve 1 mg/kg average PCBs.
- Woods Pond Reach 6: sediment removal and capping, with post-capping minimum of six feet of water depth.
- Reach 7 Impoundments: Removal and backfill to achieve 1 mg/kg PCB average in the three impoundments in Lee; capping at Willow Mill dam and impoundment and removal of the Columbia Mill and Eagle Mill dams.
- Floodplains: remove/replace soils to achieve primary or secondary standards; in Frequently Used Subareas remove and replace soils to achieve standards specific to human use; treat vernal pools, with up to 10 pools enrolled in a pilot study to evaluate removal and soil amendment.
- Sediment/soils disposal: lower-level PCB contaminated soils (≤ 50 mg/kg) to be disposed of in a UDF in Lee, designed to permit-directed specifications, with the total overall PCB concentration of deposits averaging 25 mg/kg; sediment/soils with highest PCB concentrations to be shipped out of state to separate PCB-permitted facilities, with a minimum of 100,000 cy of soils with highest concentrations being shipped out of state.
- Potential for hydraulic dredging and transfer of river materials from Reaches 5C and 6 to UDF via hydraulic pipe.⁴

The siting of the UDF in Lee is controversial and is opposed by many local citizens, with particular concerns about the ecological and human health impacts and the potential for leakage of contamination into water resources and air from PCB transport and disposal.

Brownfield Sites

Brownfields are defined by the EPA as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or

⁴ U.S. EPA, July 2020. *Statement of Basis for EPA's Proposal 2020 Revisions to the Remedial action for the Housatonic River "Rest of River,"* Boston, MA.

contaminant.” Initial steps include determining whether sites are contaminated by a hazardous substance or other pollutant. Remediation of contaminated sites include cleaning up contaminants and then reinvesting in these properties. By redeveloping these sites the town protects the environment, reduces blight, and takes development pressures off greenspaces and working lands.

The Town of Lee secured a Brownfields Cleanup Grant from the EPA in 2012 to cleanup a town owned, residential property contaminated by petroleum substances. Through the grant, the structure at 25 School Street was demolished after properly disposing of asbestos laden materials. Confirmatory sampling has revealed that there are no contaminants remaining on the site above state thresholds. A *Permanent Solution with No Conditions Statement* was submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in accordance with the Massachusetts Contingency Plan in April 30, 2015. The town successfully sold this property at auction to a local resident.

In 2013, the Town was awarded a Brownfields Area-wide Planning Grant by the EPA. The purpose of the grant was to develop a plan for the four former paper mills (Eagle, Greylock, Columbia, and Niagara) which are in a 700 acre area radius just north of the downtown.

Core Elements of Brownfields Area-Wide Planning include:

- Collecting information and identifying community priorities related to brownfields cleanup and near-and long-term revitalization.
- Evaluating existing environmental conditions, local market potential, and needed infrastructure improvements.
- Developing strategies for brownfields site cleanup and reuse.
- Identifying resources or leveraging opportunities to help implement the plans, including specific strategies for public and private sector investments and improvements necessary to help with cleanup and area revitalization.

The Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Program (BFAWP) is designed to help communities confront local environmental and public health challenges related to brownfields and to benefit underserved or economically disadvantaged communities. Area-wide planning for brownfields encourages community-based involvement in site assessment, cleanup and reuse planning, as well as overall neighborhood revitalization. Through the brownfields area-wide planning approach, the Town and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission are working with residents and other stakeholders to develop reuse plans for the four mills which are considered to be “catalyst” brownfield sites.

The anticipated outcomes from this project will enable the town to:

- research strategies for appropriately reusing brownfields, which will help lead to eventual assessment, cleanup and improvement of public health.
- connect assessment, cleanup, and decisions for subsequent reuse of these brownfields to their neighborhood and town-wide contexts.
- increase capacity of residents and stakeholders from the BFAWP Project Area to participate in, take ownership of, and benefit from brownfields revitalization in their community.
- further the network of local, regional, state, and/or federal partnerships that will help facilitate environmentally sustainable and equitable brownfields cleanup and redevelopment.

Through this process, the partners are working to emphasize the importance of redeveloping these formerly industrial sites in favor of undeveloped sites. In addition, open space and recreation components are planned to be incorporated into the plan with recommendations for a riverwalk or multi-use trail connecting the sites to one another and to the downtown. In addition, recommendations are expected to include incorporated canoe launches within the sites and maintaining green spaces within the sites themselves to enhance the quality of life for those living and/or working in the area.

The Town has worked with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to utilize the Berkshire Brownfields Program to undertake assessment activities and remediation through Berkshire Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund. The Town has also sought community-wide assessment funds directly through EPA to assess sites within the town, focusing on the mills within the Brownfields Area-wide Planning Project. The Town has not conducted a comprehensive inventory of brownfield sites. However, since the definition of brownfields is not exclusive to sites with known contamination but rather includes sites that may have the presence or potential of contamination, it is understood that any gas station, auto shop, dry cleaner, industrial site, etc. may be considered brownfields.

Landfills

The Town of Lee operated a sanitary landfill at a site off Woodland Road for more than thirty years until its closure in 1991. As was often the case, the landfill was sited in a sand and gravel deposit. The facility has been capped and currently poses no major environmental hazard. As part of the State's closure procedure, the Town was required to perform a Comprehensive Site Assessment, which included the installation of groundwater monitoring wells. Although no existing groundwater contamination problems were identified, the town is required to continue monitoring groundwater quality. A solar facility is located atop this site.

Schweitzer-Mauduit's closed Willow Hill landfill is much larger and had the potential to produce enough electricity to offset the cost of interconnection. The site extends into Lenox, and each community's land use permitting board approved the solar project. Both towns signed agreements with

the developer, which would reduce the towns' electricity costs. The project became operational at the end of 2016.

Erosion

Because of Lee's steep topography in some portions of town, the potential for soil erosion is always present. Serious erosion problems were experienced near the base of October Mountain from the construction of October Mountain Village Condominiums. Therefore, the town is vigilant and strictly enforces erosion control measures before, during, and after construction. The Town accepted the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act in 2001, approved a map of the regulated areas in 2006 and formally filed the regulations in the Registry of Deeds in 2008. The regulations create uniform procedures regulating removal, filling, clearing of vegetation, or other altering of land within mountain regions designated by the town which are likely to have a significant adverse effect on watershed resources or natural scenic qualities.

The logging of stands of timber located on steep slopes can present erosion problems. Wise logging practices must be observed along streams and on steeply sloped watershed areas. The Massachusetts Forest Cutting Practices Act (MGL Ch. 132) requires that logging be conducted using best management practices to protect natural and wetland resources. Commercial timber harvests can only be conducted under the conditions of a site-specific forest cutting plan, which is overseen by the Department of Conservation and Recreation Service Foresters. The Conservation Commission also monitors these operations and has been successful in cleaning up several minor violations.

Chronic Flooding

The history of flooding from streams in Lee indicates that flooding can occur during any season of the year. Floods occur as a result of spring rains combined with snowmelt, rain over frozen grounds, and heavy rains associated with hurricanes in late summer and fall. Land disturbance, removal of natural vegetation and construction of impervious surface areas (e.g. buildings, parking lots, roads) accelerate surface runoff volumes during precipitation events.

There have been a number of floods in Lee during this century. Many of East Lee's light industry was washed out in a series of floods- the most devastating taking place in 1886. The four worst floods on the Housatonic River since 1914 were recorded on January 1, 1949; September 22, 1938; March 19, 1936; and November 5, 1927.

The Town's zoning bylaw and map establish a floodplain overlay district adjacent to the Housatonic River. In that district, special permits are required for any new buildings. The overall effect is to prohibit or severely limit construction that would increase flood levels.

In 2009 the Lee town officials worked with the BRPC to update the town's *Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan*. This plan is currently (2023-2024) undergoing an update and should be completed after the

development of the OSRP. Several areas have been identified and are listed as chronically flooding during spring melt or severe precipitation events. Many sites flood because of undersized drainage infrastructure. A site of particular environmental concern is the area on Meadow Street where a junkyard property routinely floods which increases the risk that chemicals from the stored machinery and vehicles could contaminate surface and/or groundwater. Another concern is the flooding that occurs on the town's wastewater treatment plant.

Sedimentation

The potential for sedimentation problems exists where erodible soils are found on steep slopes in areas that are adjacent to water bodies. One example of the type of environmental damage that can occur in this situation occurred when a detention basin dam burst at October Mountain Village, causing significant quantities of sediment to be washed into Coddington Brook and the "Cove Area." Although such events have been relatively rare in Lee, future development in marginal areas will increase their likelihood if formal erosion and sedimentation control measures are not put in place.

New Development

Over the next decade, most new development that takes place in Lee will have an impact on recreation and open space because much of the land currently available for development has some form of development constraint. As land development begins to occur in more marginal areas, the zoning and land use controls and growth management techniques will increase in importance. The largest development project to occur in Lee is the redevelopment of the former Eagle Mill complex. This project is expected to take several years to complete, with groundbreaking during the summer of 2023.

The map of unique features clearly indicates that many of the features that are so important to Lee's identity today will be subject to increasing development pressure over the next decade. The rural character of Lee, as defined by its working farms and meadows, is endangered. The town's scenic roads, and the views that were identified by various town residents as most scenic, often include agricultural or open land.

Ground and Surface Water Pollution

Woods Pond/October Mountain Aquifer

Local industry is using a smaller quantity of water from the aquifer as industrial uses have decreased. Traces of PCB's were reported (Mass. DEQE, 1975) in water quality samples taken from the aquifer which suggests that contamination may have seeped into the recharge area through induced infiltration from Woods Pond and the Housatonic River. This information led to a decision by the DEQE to discourage development of a public drinking water supply at the Woods Pond location despite significant quantities of groundwater.

Greenwater Pond Brook Aquifer

Because of its location adjacent to the Massachusetts Turnpike where large quantities of road salt are used in the winter, the Greenwater Pond Brook Aquifer has very high sodium levels in the winter months. Consideration needs to be given to the implementation of measures to lower salt use in specific portions of the recharge area particularly since there are several private households that draw their drinking water supply from the aquifer.

Septic Systems

Over 85% of Lee's households are on public sewer. Where septic systems do exist, they are well maintained due to aggressive enforcement of Title 5 by the Tri-Town Health Department. The few contamination problems that do exist are due to system overloads that occur as seasonal lakeside cottages are converted to year-round use and involve the seasonal high-water table.

Lake Eutrophication

Eutrophication is a problem that is common to both Laurel Lake and Goose Pond, and in both cases the accelerated growth of invasive non-native aquatic plants especially Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) is a result. In both instances elevated levels of phosphorous and shoreline sedimentation may be a factor in excessive plant growth. Goose Pond residents formed a lake district to deal with this and other water-related problems. Laurel Lake residents also formed a lake association. Several species of invasive aquatic plants such as milfoil and water chestnut are also found in Woods Pond.

Impaired Waterbodies

The health and quality of Lee's surface waters is generally good, with all of the few streams that have been assessed having been determined to meet the uses for fish, other aquatic life and wildlife. However, these resources are highly vulnerable to "nonpoint" pollution. This type of pollution occurs as rain and snowmelt that flow into our lakes and streams carry diffuse amounts of pollutants. Oil, gasoline, salts and chemicals wash off of roadways and parking lots. Fertilizers, pesticides, and soil run off from improperly managed construction sites, crop lands, and forests. These pollutants alter the water chemistry, depth, and temperature, stressing native plants and animals and making it possible for invasive species to thrive. Over time, fishing becomes more difficult as weeds take over. As sediments fill the water body, flooding can occur and boating and swimming may no longer be possible. Best practices, such as low impact development, aimed at minimizing impervious surfaces and guarding against runoff, should be adopted in Lee's subdivision and zoning regulations.

The MA DEP is responsible for identifying those waters that are impaired and developing a plan to bring them back into compliance with the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards. The *Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle* lists the health of the state's streams, rivers, lakes, and coastal waters, and if they are impaired the list cites the reasons for their impairment. In general these waters are safe for human recreational use, with the exception that

fish consumption is prohibited in the Housatonic River because of PCB contamination. The following river segments and waterbodies are listed as impaired 2022 reporting cycle.⁵

The Housatonic River from Pittsfield to Woods Pond in Lee is impaired by:

- Water Chestnut
- Fecal Coliform
- PCB in Fish Tissue
- PCBs in sediment

The Housatonic River from the outlet of Woods Pond in Lee to the Risingdale Impoundment in Great Barrington is impaired by:

- Zebra mussel
- Excess Algal Growth
- Ambient Bioassays – Chronic Aquatic Toxicity
- PCB in Fish Tissue
- PCBs in Sediment
- Phosphorus (Total)
- Polychlorinated biphenyls

Laurel Lake is impaired by:

- EWM
- Brittle Naiad
- Curly-leaf Pondweed
- Water Chestnut
- Zebra Mussel
- Dissolved Oxygen
- Phosphorus (Total)

Laurel Lake and its outlet into the Housatonic River is impaired by:

- Zebra mussel

Goose Pond is impaired by:

- Eurasian Water Milfoil

Invasive Species

Opening forest canopy during logging operations or development projects can disrupt the forest ecology and allow invasive species an opportunity to establish and flourish. Those who open the canopy, together with the Town, must be vigilant to monitor and remove invasive species when they are found.

Invasive aquatic plant growth impedes the recreational use of Laurel Lake, Goose Pond and Woods Pond. The aquatic plant Eurasian Water Milfoil is the plant of most concern in all these waterbodies, but water chestnut, Phragmites and purple loosestrife are also present. These plants disrupt and displace the natural plant diversities that would naturally occur in these waterbodies, diminishing the long-term survival of natural plant and wildlife populations within these areas.

⁵ MassDEP. 2023. *Final Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters for the Clean Water Act 2022 Reporting Cycle. CN 568.1, Mass DEP, Worcester, MA.*

The layers of sediment and the resulting shallow, warm water of Woods Pond and the backwaters upstream of it provides the perfect growth medium for non-native invasive aquatic plant species, including Eurasian Water Milfoil and water chestnut. Wetlands and uplands adjacent to the pond and river harbor vast acreage where purple loosestrife, Phragmites and other non-native species dominate. Also, because the pond and the Housatonic River upstream of it are a very popular paddling route, the chance that fragments and seeds can be transported from this area to other aquatic recreational areas is high.

The removal of contaminated pond sediments during the Rest of River cleanup offers the opportunity to remove the vast infestation of invasive species in the pond and upstream of it, with the added opportunity of replanting these areas with native plants. To achieve any measure of success, a long-term maintenance plan will be required to monitor these areas and quickly take action to remove new invasive plant infestations. The removal and control of invasive plants is an important yet understated benefit of the Rest of River cleanup plan for this reach of the watershed.

A three-foot annual drawdown of Laurel Lake and some hand-pulling is conducted in an effort to control excessive aquatic plant growth, primarily that of Eurasian Water Milfoil. The Goose Pond Maintenance District conducts an annual drawdown and hand-pulling efforts on Goose Pond, and periodically applies herbicides to control primarily Eurasian Water Milfoil growth. Future herbicide applications are planned to control both milfoil and Phragmites. The district and state biologists are monitoring the pond for zebra mussels and, to date, none have been found. Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) were discovered in Laurel Lake in July of 2009 and confirmed by the DCR Lakes and Ponds Program. DCR biologists found adults and veligers in Laurel Lake and adults in Laurel Brook. The discovery of zebra mussels in Laurel Lake prompted a series of actions by state agencies that are summarized in the Massachusetts Interim Zebra Mussel Action Plan (DCR and DFG 2009). The Interim Zebra Mussel Action Plan also provides an overview of zebra mussel species taxonomy, ecology, origin and distribution.

The DCR has installed a monitoring station and boat wash facility at the Laurel Lake public boat ramp on Rt. 20. In an effort to contain the spread of zebra mussels from the lake, monitors assigned to the boat ramp educate boat owners, check boats for signs of contamination and require boat washing.

Environmental Equity Issues

Public open space and recreational areas are found throughout the town, often extending into nearby communities (See Figure 13). Some neighborhoods are in close proximity to large expansive tracts of state forest lands, wildlife management areas and land trust properties, while other neighborhoods are in closer proximity to town parks or smaller forest areas. In general, those residents who live in the eastern and southern portion of the town have outstanding access to nature-related activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, and wildlife viewing through state and land trust lands. However, they may have to travel for more than a mile or two to visit managed parks or athletic fields. Conversely, residents in the central or northern portion of the town are in closer proximity to town parks, athletic fields, and smaller

forest areas, such as Ferncliff, the Golden Hill Town Forest and the Town Farm (aka Stockbridge Road Recreation Area). The Environmental Justice area of Lee is centrally located and, depending on where inside this area a resident lives, he/she likely has a park, athletic field or small forested area within $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of his/her home.

Maintenance of Outdoor Facilities

Maintaining public outdoor recreational facilities such as trail systems, playgrounds or parking areas is a challenge for all property owners, whether they be state, municipal, or nonprofit entities. Trail systems and parking areas, particularly those located in steep terrain, can be damaged or eroded by overuse or wet weather conditions, and playground equipment can become damaged by age, weather or vandalism. Even small weather events such as a wind storm can litter a trail system with branches and render them unpassable. Litter is a constant issue in state- and town-owned parks. Although some groups have a good network of volunteers, it is difficult to maintain consistent, quality conditions. The Greener Gateway Committee organizes community events to maintain the appearance of town parks, assist with community events such as Founder's Day and helps to recycle some of the waste removed, such as plastic drink bottles.

The Lee Conservation Commission does not have the resources to enhance the recreational potential of the lands that they oversee. Local residents such as those at Longcope Park have offered to aid the town, including plans for improved bridges for better accessibility. An abutter to Ferncliff tried to garner support from her neighbors to clean up the area but was unsuccessful because of residents' concerns that improving the area would attract more misuse. The Lee Land Trust is a small, non-profit group of volunteers who preserve land, keep aware of developments in Lee, want to maintain the rural heritage, and are stewards, along with others, of the trails in Lee. Other conservation organizations such as the Berkshire Natural Resources Council sponsor work days and trail maintenance projects at town properties. More information about volunteer activities in Lee Parks can be found in Appendix C.

Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

As noted in *America's Great Outdoors, A Promise to Future Generations*, outdoor recreation provides American's physical and emotional rejuvenation and promotes respect for our natural heritage. Research indicates that regular exposure to nature lowers stress, cultivates creativity, and builds self-confidence among young people. Heritage landscapes provide us with a sense of our cultural and agricultural past. Revenue from farms and forests supports local families, some of whom have worked the land for generations. Local farms can also provide fresh produce and meat, while forests can provide wood products, heating fuel and maple syrup.

Undeveloped natural lands serve many natural and social functions, including wildlife habitat and corridors, water quality protection, flood control and, with the growing impacts of climate change, carbon sequestration. Conserved undeveloped lands offer residents a place to enter a fresh and quiet environment and to reconnect with nature. Outdoor recreation is increasingly seen as a way to increase peoples' activity level and combat health issues such as high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

Lee's vast forests, wetlands, fields and meadows, in combination with extensive holdings of publicly owned land are both protected and unprotected assets (See Map 13 and the Inventory on following pages). Lee Residents and the many tourists who visit the "Gateway to the Berkshires" benefit from the extensive opportunities for passive and active recreation in the state parks, wildlife protection areas, Lee Land Trust and town conservation lands, and private recreational facilities such as Greenock Golf Course.

The following sections list the various land parcels in the town that are undeveloped and describes whether or not those lands are available for the public to use. In general, those lands that are permanently protected for conservation and/or recreation are the most valuable to the public over the long term because they will not be threatened with development and will remain open for future generations. For the purposes of this plan, federal and state lands are being considered permanently protected because they are currently being maintained for conservation and/or recreational purposes. Most conservation lands owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are protected under Article 97, an amendment to the state constitution. To remove the protection status of these lands for development would require a

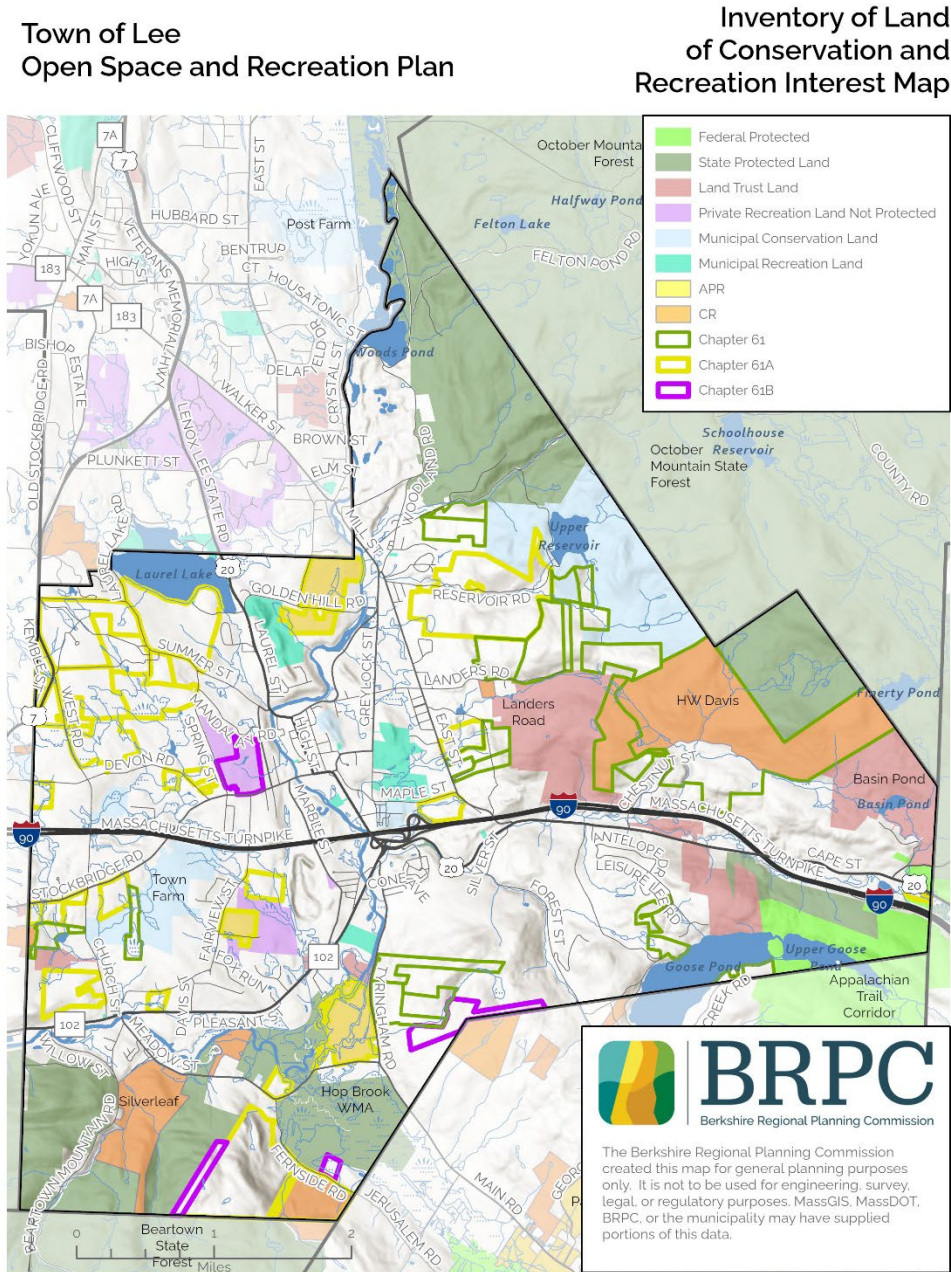
2/3 vote within the state legislature. Although such a scenario could occur, the action would undoubtedly be contentious and likely garner a public uproar. Other lands considered permanently protected are those owned by local land trusts, as these were purchased with a conservation intent, and lands that are prohibited from development due to placement of a deeded restriction, including conservation and agricultural restrictions.

The protection status of municipally owned lands varies widely depending upon the circumstances under which the land was acquired. If the lands were acquired and accepted by town meeting vote that the lands are for conservation purposes, then it would take a special act of town meeting and the state legislature to take the land out of conservation use. Lee's watershed lands surrounding the drinking water reservoirs are within this category. However, if the reservoirs were to be withdrawn as drinking water supplies for some reason, this protection status could be removed. In fact, some of these waterbodies may be attractive sites for shoreline development. Other municipally-owned conservation and recreation lands typically include parks, playing fields, playgrounds, and school properties. These kinds of lands are not typically deed restricted and thus could be vulnerable to change. Although it is unlikely that Lee would sell public open space lands for development, there could arise a situation in which the public benefits of the land transfer would outweigh the cost of losing open land.

State and Federal Parklands

Lee residents are fortunate in that there are almost 3,000 acres of land owned and protected by the state and federal governments. Over 2,047 acres of state land in South Lee and East Lee are permanently protected as part of the October Mountain and Beartown State Forests. These properties offer a variety of recreational activities including hunting, camping, fishing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Some of these facilities are handicapped accessible. The George L. Darey Housatonic Valley and Hop Brook Wildlife Management areas in the eastern and southern areas of Town are permanently protected lands managed primarily for wildlife habitat protection. Other acreage owned by the state are the Sernaker Property, wedged between the Appalachian Trail, the Massachusetts Turnpike, and Goose Pond. There is also an almost 1/2-acre owned by the state for the Laurel Lake Boat Ramp. Totaled, the Commonwealth owns approximately 2,663 acres within Lee's boundaries. The U.S. Department of the Interior also has 247 acres of land in Lee under permanent protection as part of the National Scenic Appalachian Trail (AT) corridor. In an effort to support use of the AT and those who hike it, the Town of Lee has recently become a designated Appalachian Trail Community, joining the Berkshire towns of Great Barrington, Dalton, Cheshire and North Adams. Lee's goal is to support thru-hikers in their journey, with all the resupply services that Lee has to offer. The locations of state- and federally owned properties are shown in Figure 13.

Figure 15 Conservation and Recreation Lands Map



Lee residents are fortunate to have easy access to October Mountain State Forest. As the largest state forest in Massachusetts (16,500 acres), it offers residents an opportunity to enjoy several miles of trails and dirt roads through a large expanse of forest land. Taking together the state forest, combined with adjacent conservation lands owned by Berkshire Natural Resources Council, the watershed lands of the

City of Pittsfield and the Town of Lee, and the conservation-restricted Davis property, this land mass may be the largest contiguous area of conserved land in the state outside of the Quabbin Reservoir. October Mountain State Forest is popular with local residents because its main entrance is located in Lee, where residents can easily go hiking, hunting, mountain biking, boating, snowmobiling and camping. As one of only a few state lands that allows off-highway vehicles (OHVs), residents can enjoy this activity without having to trailer their vehicles very far. Lee residents can also easily access Beartown State Forest. At 12,000 acres it is also one of the largest state properties in the Commonwealth. Outdoor activities are similar to October Mountain including OHV use trails. Although not located within Lee, Beartown State Forest hosts accessible facilities at Benedict Pond, along with a Heart-healthy, easy two-mile loop trail.

Table 4 State and Federal Lands

Site Name	Acres	Owner	Rec. Activities
Appalachian Trail Corridor	246.9	U.S. National Park Service	Hiking
Beartown State Forest*	668.4	DCR - Div. of State Parks and Rec.	Hiking, biking, canoe/kayaking, swimming, fishing, ORVs, snowmobiling, camping, picnic areas, some accessible facilities
George L. Darey Housatonic Valley WMA*	43.3	Dept. of Fish and Game	Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, canoe/kayaking, hiking
Hop Brook WMA	435.7	Dept. of Fish and Game	Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking
Laurel Lake Boat Ramp	0.4	DCR - Div. of State Parks and Rec.	Boat launch, fishing
October Mountain State Forest*	1,377.8	DCR - Div. of State Parks and Rec.	Hiking, biking, canoe/kayaking, fishing, ORVs, snowmobiling, camping, picnic areas
Sernacker Property	134.8	Commonwealth of Mass.	None
Water Street Land	2.6	Commonwealth of Mass.	None
Total	2,909.9		

Source: MassGIS

* Activities are found within these properties, but may lie outside Lee town limits

The George Darey Housatonic Valley Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (totaling 874 acres in Pittsfield, Lenox, and Lee) hosts a variety of habitats within a small area including river channel, river oxbows, and backwaters interspersed with seasonally flooded forests, shrub swamps, and open-water marshes. Bald eagles, ospreys, beavers and waterfowl top the list of a wide variety of animals that are frequently seen along the river corridor. The Hop Brook WMA (totaling 461 acres in Lee and Tyringham) consists of fields, wetlands, and floodplain forests that offer a wide variety of fishing and hunting opportunities along with the opportunity to view uncommon wetland species, including marsh birds,

butterflies, and sedges. Both WMAs are stocked with ringneck pheasants in the fall. The main purpose of WMAs are for the protection of wildlife habitats for long-term biodiversity and as such, are intentionally maintained in a wild state, although some areas will maintain meadows for support of specific species. WMAs areas provide a wild experience for those who are comfortable bushwhacking through areas that lack trail systems. The National Park Service owns 247 acres on five parcels of land along the Appalachian National Scenic Trail corridor as it travels through the eastern portion of the town. The AT is a renowned historic long-trail reaching almost 2,200 miles between Georgia and Maine. A list of the properties and the activities offered by them are found in Table 4.

Private Parcels

Lands Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B

There are several property owners that have placed all or a portion of their lands into one of the Massachusetts Chapter 61 Tax Abatement Programs. Chapter 61 is a tax abatement program that offers a real estate tax savings to forest landowners. The intent of the program is to protect and enhance the state's timber-producing capacity. Working forests can also provide an array of outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Like Chapter 61, Chapter 61A is a voluntary enrollment program for preferential tax assessment based on current agricultural use of the land. Chapter 61B is a recreational land classification program designed to encourage the preservation of open space and promote recreational uses.

The Chapter 61 tax programs are of interest to municipalities for two main reasons. First, lands that are managed for forest, agricultural or recreational uses remain open and scenic, helping communities maintain their historically rural roots. Second, if a property that is enrolled in any of the Chapter 61 programs is placed on the real estate market for a change of use, the Town has a 120-day right of first refusal to purchase the property at fair market value. For example, if a farm purchased for the development of a subdivision or a commercial use, which is different from its current agricultural use, then the Town has the right to purchase that property before anyone else. This gives the community some control over the destiny of its rural character. If the Town does not acquire the land and it does change use, the tax savings that had accumulated during the land's enrollment in the Chapter 61 program must be paid back in full prior to the land use taking place.

Current available data indicate approximately 3,685 acres of land are currently classified as "chapter lands," signifying that they are taxed under one of three use categories affording the properties temporary protection from development. There are four farms that have more than 100 acres listed with the Chapter 61A program, of which Highlawn Farm has the most land enrolled. In addition to operating as a modern dairy farm, Highlawn Farm has expanded and now invites the public to its Farmstead Creamery Shop to enjoy artisan cheeses and ice creams. The shop introduces the residents and visitors to the agricultural life that was so prevalent in Lee a few generations ago. Public access to most Chapter land properties requires property owner permission. It should be noted that some of these properties, or a

portion of them, are also encumbered with deed restrictions so that a portion of the properties may be protected permanently. The Davis and La Fattoria properties are examples of this overlap. Also notable is the Greenock Golf Course, which has enrolled the course in Chapter 61B. Adjacent to St. Mary's Cemetery, these two properties encompass a large area of open space lands in the center of Lee. These lands are listed in Table 5. The parcel boundaries of these lands are outlined in green, yellow, and purple on Figure 13.

When comparing the open space inventory map and data generated during the previous OSRP of 2016 to the current map and data, it appears that some lands that were previously enrolled in Chapter 61 and 61A are no longer enrolled. However, new Chapter 61 lands have been enrolled off Landers Road (approximately 150 acres) and off Tyringham Road (approximately 100 acres). A few scattered Chapter 61A lands in South Lee and Chapter 61B involving Greenock Golf Course (59 acres) have also been enrolled. In all, there has been a net gain of more than 550 acres enrolled in Chapter 61 tax programs since 2016.

Table 5 Chapter 61, 61A and 61B Lands

Chapter 61 Status	Address Street	Owner	Acres
Chapter 61	COOPER CREEK RD	APFEL WILLAM F & ELLEN R	4.9
Chapter 61	CHURCH ST	AZUMA HARRY SELOM	26.7
Chapter 61A	FAIRVIEW ST	BARTINI ROBERT J	31.4
Chapter 61B	BEARTOWN MTN RD	BOSSIDY-SEWALL TRUST	37.3
Chapter 61A	FAIRVIEW ST	BRITTAIN R CHRISTOPHER	30.9
Chapter 61	TYRINGHAM RD	BRUCE DAVID & DONNA	56.1
Chapter 61A	EAST ST	CARRINGTON DAVID	35.7
Chapter 61	OFF LANDERS RD	CARRINGTON MARION	71.7
Chapter 61	EAST ST	DOOLEY JOANNE B. & MICHAEL J	57.7
Chapter 61	TYRINGHAM RD	DRAKE GERALD	57.5
Chapter 61	OFF TYRINGHAM RD	DRAKE GERALD E JR	38.4
Chapter 61	COOPER CREEK RD	DUNLAEVY SUSAN P TRUSTEE	17.2
Chapter 61	STOCKBRIDGE RD	FEIT IRVING N	25.5
Chapter 61A	MAPLE ST	FIELD ALICE W	30.5
Chapter 61A	MEADOW ST	FORD MEREDITH M TRUSTEE	256.1
Chapter 61A	DEVON RD	FRASER DOROTHY P	13.0
Chapter 61A	DEVON RD	FRASER JOHN A TRUSTEE	8.4
Chapter 61	OCT MT, OFF LANDERS	GARRITY STEVEN	79.4
Chapter 61B	WEST PARK ST	GREENOCK COUNTRY CLUB	59.1
Chapter 61	CHESTNUT ST	GRENELL BARBARA	19.7
Chapter 61	OCT MT	HICKEY PATRICK G & BRIGGS J TODD	88.7
Chapter 61A	SUMMER, KEMBLE, SPRING STS; WEST RD	HIGHLAWN REALTY LLC	755.0
Chapter 61	WASHINGTON MT RD	HOGENCAMP ROBERT W, BRIAN R & BRENDA G	71.4
Chapter 61	CHESTNUT ST	HORACE W DAVIS REALTY CORPORATION	847.1
Chapter 61A	STOCKBRIDGE RD	JOHANSEN MARY LEE	31.1
Chapter 61A	GOLDEN HILL RD	LA FATTORIA LLC	117.4
Chapter 61A	RESERVOIR RD	LEAHEY DAIRY	306.5
Chapter 61A	DEVON RD	MICHAUD LISA & MICHAUD MARK	16.9
Chapter 61	LEISURE LEE RD	MISROK LAWRENCE & RUTH CO TRUSTEES	18.8
Chapter 61A	STOCKBRIDGE RD	NAVENTI PETER & DIANE	25.7
Chapter 61A	CAPE ST	SANCHEZ LIVIO	8.7
Chapter 61A	CHURCH ST	SIOK JOHN A & KATHIE C	66.8

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Chapter 61 Status	Address Street	Owner	Acres
Chapter 61A	PLEASANT ST	SUMNER LLC	11.0
Chapter 61A	CHURCH ST	TERRY RONALD J & CAROL A	6.0
Chapter 61A	FERNSIDE RD	THIEME M DONALD & AMES THEODORE TRUSTEES	92.8
Chapter 61	LANDERS RD	TOOLE JOSEPH & LYNN M	58.3
Chapter 61A	MEADOW ST	TOUPONCE THOMAS	119.8
Chapter 61B	OFF TYRINGHAM RD	TYRINGHAM ROAD LAND TRUST	65.8
Chapter 61	CHANTERWOOD RD	WPF LLC	19.8
Total			3,684.7

Source: MassGIS 2016

Non-protected Privately Owned Recreation and Open Space Important to the Town

The final category of recreation and open space involves lands that are in some type of recreational use but are privately owned and unprotected from development. Notable properties include the Oak ‘n’ Spruce Resort, which offers year-round trails and indoor swimming and other recreational amenities, the Greenock Country Club that offers golf to the public and the Lee Sportsmen’s Club. In these cases, access is by fee or membership only. Smaller private parcels open to the public free of charge include St. Mary’s School grounds and Cemetery, Lee Bank Little League Field, Marble Street Playground, Sandy Beach and Lee Congregational Church “Town” Park.

Table 6 Non-Protected Privately-Owned Recreation and Open Spaces Important to the Town

Site Name	Acres	Owner	Purpose / Activities	Public Access
Lee Congregational Church Park	1.0	Lee Congregational Church	Rec / community gatherings	Yes
Lee Bank Little League Field	4.0	Lee Bank	Rec / athletic field	Limited
Lee Sportsmen's Association	97.6	Lee Sportsmen's Association	Cons & Rec / private	Limited
Lee Town Beach (Sandy Beach)	1.0	Highlawn Realty	Rec / swimming beach	Limited
Marble Street Playground	2.5	Oldcastle Stone Products	Rec / playground, basketball, playing fields	Yes
St. Mary’s Cemetery	35.6	St. Mary’s Church Society	Burial / historic / walking	Yes
St. Mary's Playground	1.5	St. Mary's Church	Rec / playground, large open land	Limited
Total	143.2			

Source: MassGIS 2016

Public and Nonprofit Parcels

Town-owned Conservation Lands

Town-owned lands under some form of permanent protection include properties under the jurisdiction of the Lee Conservation Commission and town watershed lands. Lands to be maintained for conservation and passive recreation under Conservation Commission control include Dunn Park Preserve,

Longcope Park, Ferncliff Reservation, Edith Wharton Park, Golden Hill Town Forest, and Abbey Court Park totaling slightly more than 170 acres. In general, the properties overseen by the Conservation Commission are forested sites with unimproved trails systems for hiking with limited parking and no facilities or picnic areas. Steep slopes are found on most sites rendering them inaccessible for physically disabled persons. Commercial activity and motorized vehicles are prohibited. In addition, the Town owns two large parcels of land totaling 171 acres off Stockbridge Road known as the Stockbridge Road Recreation Area or Town Farm, which was originally acquired for a proposed municipal golf course. Proposals for the property include continued agricultural use, a trail network, passive recreation, control of invasive species, and wildlife habitat.

The Town also owns over 600 acres of watershed land in the eastern portion of town. This land was acquired to protect the town's drinking water supply. Recreation is not permitted on the watershed lands.

Town-Owned Recreation Lands

The Town of Lee owns and maintains several recreational lands scattered throughout the Town. Neighborhood parks are located at the school, Marble Street, South Lee, and East Lee. Athletic fields are found at the school, Lee Athletic Field, and the Soccer Field properties.

Town owned lands not subject to permanent protection include pocket neighborhood parks, school grounds, playing fields, and areas for active recreation. Approximately 326 acres falls into this category). Most have some level of handicap accessibility.

Figure 16 Coral Fungus

Photo Credit: Linda Cysz



2024 Lee Open Space and Recreation Plan

Table 7 Town-Owned Recreation Land

Site Name	Acres	Owner / Manager	Primary Use/Activities	Public Access	Level of Protection	Zoning	Condition and Potential
Athletic Field	4.5	Town of Lee (Lee) / DPW	Rec / athletic field, basketball, skate park, playground, pavilion RIVER ACCES	Yes	Perpetuity	CBC	Excellent -- ADA parking and other improvements needed
Bradley Street Playground	0.9	Lee	Rec / playground, basketball	Yes	Limited	RA-40	Fair -- ADA parking and other improvements needed
Dunn Park	32.6	Lee / Con Com	Conservation (Cons) / walking	Yes	Perpetuity	RA-40	Undeveloped – Wet conditions and other constraints limit expanded use
East Lee Park	1.6	Lee / DPW	Rec / Baseball field, playground	Yes	Perpetuity	RA-40	Fair – High potential for adding & upgrading; ADA parking and other improvements needed
Edith Wharton Conservation Area	3.1	Lee / Con Com	Cons & Rec / walking, fishing	Yes	Perpetuity	RA-40	Not developed - Possible future recreation area
Fairmont Cemetery	26.2	Lee / DPW	Burial / historic / walking	Yes	Limited	RA-40	Excellent -- Paved driveway for walking. No potential for expanded recreation

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Fernclyff Reservation	19.3	Lee / Con Com	Cons & Rec / wildlife habitat, hiking, ballfields	Yes	Limited	R-20	Fair -- Existing rustic trails, possible future easier hiking trail
Gazebo	0.5	Lee / DPW	Rec / gathering place	Yes	Limited		Excellent – Existing site developed, but possible bike path/river walk on adjacent town lots
Lee High School	55.7	Lee / School Dept. / Con Com	Rec / football, soccer, running, walking, baseball, lacrosse, softball, basketball, sledding, X-country skiing	Limited when school sports are played	Limited	R-20	Good – developed; ADA parking and other improvements needed. Land constraints.
Longcope Property	45.6	Lee / Con Com	Cons / hiking	Yes	Perpetuity	RA-40	Fair - Existing rustic hiking trails
Maple Street Park	44.6	Lee / DPW	Cons & Rec / Baseball, neighborhood activities	Yes	Limited	RA-40	Good -- ADA parking and other improvements needed
Meadow Street (South Lee) Cemetery	1.1	Lee / DPW	Burial / historic / walking	Yes	Limited	RA-40	Fair – Used for walking. No potential for expanded
South Lee Park/Playground	0.4	Lee / DPW	Rec / Playground, basketball, War Memorial	Yes	Perpetuity	RB	Excellent – High potential for adding & upgrading ADA parking and other improvements needed
Town Farm	168.5	Lee / Select Board	Cons / open land	Yes	Limited	RA-40	Undeveloped – potential for future recreation use
Town Forest / Pinnacle	69.5	Lee / Con Com	Cons & Rec / hiking	Yes	Perpetuity	R20/CR	Fair -- Existing rustic trail system. May need future trail improvements.

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Town Soccer Fields	21.3	Lee / DPW	Rec / soccer	Yes	Perpetuity	T-20	Good – ADA parking and other improvements needed
Water Department Land	610.7	Lee / Water Dept.	Cons / water supply	No	Perpetuity	CR/RA-40	Excellent - Drinking water supply protection – no public access
Lenox Town Beach	1.2	Lenox	Rec / beach	Yes	Perpetuity	RA-40/RB	Good – Fully developed

Total

1,107.50

Con Com = Conservation Commission

Cons = Conservation

DPW = Dept. of Public Works

Lee = Town of Lee

Lenox = Town of Lenox

Rec = Recreation

Source: MassGIS DATE?

Protected Non-Profit Lands and Private Deed-restricted Lands.

Several tracks of privately owned open space lands are permanently protected from development. In some cases these lands are owned outright by land trusts with a mission to protect lands for conservation and/or recreation. In other cases, the lands are owned by private landowners who have sold the development rights to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources; the land must remain undeveloped and/or in agricultural use in perpetuity. Land trusts often play a large role in local conservation efforts, where they can own land outright and may also hold deed restrictions on private lands. Three land trusts are active landowners in Lee: Lee Land Trust (130 acres), The Trustees of Reservations or The Trustees (112 acres), and the Berkshire Natural Resources Council or BNRC (698 acres). The Lee Land Trust and The Trustees own adjacent properties and partnered to develop a two-mile hiking loop that reaches a high ridge covered in flowering Mountain Laurel. These lands are shown in Figure 14 in pink. In addition to owning land, BNRC also holds Conservation Restrictions (CR) on an additional 1,054 acres of land, particularly of note on the Davis property (711 acres) and the Silverleaf property (also held by Lee Land Trust, 205 acres), shown in orange in Figure 14. The BNRC is a land trust organization that owns over 11,000 acres of publicly-accessible conservation land across Berkshire County. In general, BNRC allows public access that includes passive recreation, fishing and hunting on the lands that they own. The public may not always be welcome on private lands with CR’s, always get permission from the landowner. In total, the land trusts own or hold CRs on 1,977 acres of land.

Three farmers in Lee have placed Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) on their land, totaling 267 acres of land that will remain in agricultural use into the future. The Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program makes it economically feasible for a property to remain permanently in agriculture when the State purchases the development rights. Maintaining the working farms in Lee helps to maintain the Town’s historic and rural character and provides local farm products to residents in the area although public recreational access may not be offered. The APR lands are shown in yellow in Figure 14.

Table 8 Privately Owned Permanently Protected Lands

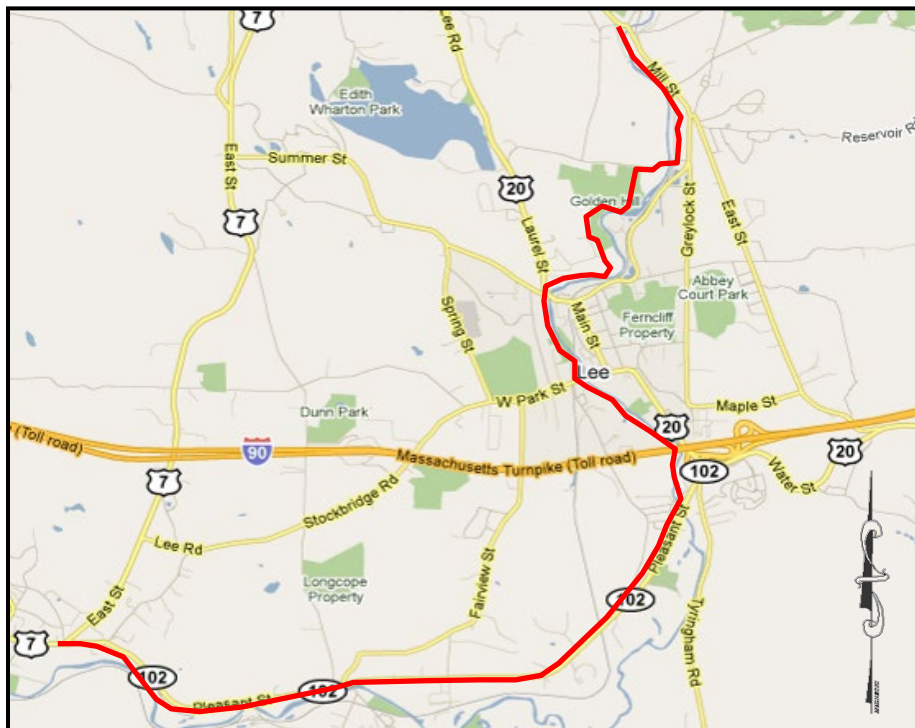
Site Name	Acres	Owner	Primary Purpose	Public Access
Bartini Robert J APR	30.0	Bartini Robert J	Ag	No
Basin Pond	297.3	Berk. Natural Resources Council (BNRC)	Cons	Yes
Courser Brook Farm APR	119.8	Hale Donald B Mary C and Alice M	Ag	No
Culleton CR	29.5	Strassler Alan	Cons	No
Fernside Road CR	92.8	Sevenson Family NT	Cons	No
Donato’s Trail	34	Lee Land Trust	Rec	Yes
Goose Pond Reservation	112	The Trustees of Reservations	Rec/Cons	Yes
Housatonic Fishing Access	24.9	BNRC	Rec/Cons	Yes
HW Davis CR	711.4	Horace W Davis Realty Corp.	Rec/Cons	No

La Fattoria APR	116.8	La Fattoria LLC	Ag	No
Landers Road	375.7	BNRC	Cons	Yes
Lee Land Trust	33	Lee Land Trust	Cons	Yes
Lee Land Trust	30	Lee Land Trust	Rec	Yes
Lee Land Trust	33	Lee Land Trust	Cons	Yes
Silverleaf CR	204.6	Silverleaf Resorts, Inc	Cons	Limited
Welte	0.6	BNRC	Cons	Yes
Yale Hill Road CR	7.3	Begley Sarah H	Cons	No
Zeif CR	8.1	American Chestnut Nominee Trust	Cons	No
Total	2,260.8			

Bicycle/Pedestrian Path –

The Lee Bike Committee with technical assistance from Foresight Land Services identified a preferred bicycle/pedestrian path through the town. The bike/ped path consists of on-road bicycle lanes along Pleasant Street (Route 102) between the Stockbridge town line and the Big Y World Class Market. This becomes an off-road path from the Big Y northward to Golden Hill Road, and once again becomes an on-road route to Lenox Dale. The total length of this route is approximately 6.7 miles and is shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17 Proposed Bike/Pedestrian Path through Lee Map



It is envisioned that the off-road section will travel parallel to the Housatonic River hopefully offering additional public access to the river itself. This corresponds with a long-desired river greenway that the Lee Conservation Commission and Lee Land Trust have advocated for to link the downtown center to parks located along its corridor. Funding has been secured for engineering services to design the section of path from the Big Y northward to Lee Bank on West Park Street. The design of Phase I is currently in development. Once the design is complete, additional funds will be available to the town for construction of this section.

The final section is the route from West Park Street to Lenox Dale. The plans for this Phase II route crosses West Park Street and continues along the river through downtown, crossing Route 20, and runs cross-country along the west/north side of the river behind the Eagle Mill to Golden Hill. Here it will become an on-road route again and run from Golden Hill Road to Bradley Street to Mill Street and end at the Lenox Dale town line. While this is the current recommended route, the Committee will continue to investigate new options to refine the most feasible pathway. Once the route is finalized, the town will need to pursue funding for design and construction of this section of the trail.

Summary of Passive Recreation Opportunities in Lee

Residents of and visitors to Lee already benefit from the extensive opportunities for passive recreation that exist in the state forests, reserves, and town conservation lands. These include hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and cross-country skiing in the October Mountain and Beartown State Forests. The Appalachian Trail footpath also crosses through Lee and can be accessed on Route 20. The town has recently become an Appalachian Trail Community. According to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy website, when a town along the trail receives designated community status, it is considered a support asset for all who use the trail, and the conservancy encourages people to explore these communities. Other Berkshire towns with Appalachian Trail status include Cheshire, Dalton, Great Barrington, and North Adams. Numerous opportunities for nature studies, bird watching, hiking and snow shoeing also exist in parcels controlled by the Lee Conservation Commission, including Dunn Park Preserve, Longcope Park, Ferncliff Reservation and the Golden Hill Town Forest.

Table 9 Existing Recreational Opportunities in Lee

Existing Recreational Opportunities					
Activity	K -	8 - 12	Ad	Senior	Disabled
Swimming	X	X	X	X	X
Tennis	X	X	X	X	X
Pickleball	X	X	X	X	
Basketball	X	X	X	X	X
Baseball	X	X			
Softball (team)	X	X	X		
Soccer	X	X	X		
Lacrosse	X	X			
Football	X	X			
Playgrounds	X	X	X	X	X
Bicycling	X	X	X	X	
Shooting Sports	X	X	X	X	X
Golf	X	X	X	X	
Girl Scouts	X	X			X
Boy Scouts	X	X			X
Skiing	X	X	X	X	X
Snowshoeing	X	X	X	X	
Ice Skating	X	X	X	X	X
Snowmobile Riding	X	X	X	X	X
Fishing/Ice Fishing	X	X	X	X	X
Hunting		X	X	X	X
Canoeing/Kayaking	X	X	X	X	
Camping	X	X	X	X	X
Walking/Running	X	X	X	X	
Hiking	X	X	X	X	
Indoor Fitness	X	X	X		
Gardening	X	X	X	X	X

Community Vision

Description of Process

The community goals were derived from several meetings, a public opinion survey, a public forum and from previously prepared comprehensive planning documents.

Figure 18 Flyer for Open Space and Recreation Forum



Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

The Vision statement for the Open Space and Recreation Plan is stated below. Lee residents' vision for the future is that the community should work together to:

Maintain and preserves Lee's present combination of outstanding natural assets, traditional New England atmosphere, and small-town community spirit that makes it a special place. Residents, leaders, and organizations should continue to promote social diversity and economic prosperity while protecting and preserving important historic, cultural, and environmental features. The community must also continue to provide high quality services, facilities, and opportunities to meet the social and economic needs of present and future residents.

Goals and Objectives are:

- *Protect water resources and preserve riparian habitat.*
- *Protect mountain ridges and steep slopes.*
- *Preserve farmlands and pastures and encourage growth in agriculture.*
- *Promote passive outdoor recreation.*
- *Provide active outdoor recreation opportunities and areas.*
- *Promote cooperative use of resources and encourage participation.*
- *Promote and protect the historic characteristics of the town.*
- *Maintain the visual character and attractiveness of developed areas, particularly in gateway areas of high visibility.*
- *Continue to provide high quality public educational and town services and facilities.*
- *Encourage walking, bicycling & transit as transportation options.*
- *Promote retention of scenic and community qualities related to road corridors.*
- *Promote land use that meets social and economic needs while maintaining or improving the quality of the environment.*
- *Preserve Conservation Lands.*

Analysis of Needs

The analysis of needs is based upon the results of a community survey which was completed as part of the Master Planning process in the Town of Lee and described in the Introduction. An important part of this process was a review of the draft of the 2016 *Lee Open Space and Recreation Plan* to evaluate how well the town has performed in meeting the goals and objectives stated in that plan. During the planning process, the issue of whether those needs that remain unaddressed are still valid or not was considered through the lens of changing demographics, development trends, and newly defined community preferences.

Potential natural resources needs for consideration:

- Protection of working farms, particularly High Lawn Farm which owns such a large expanse of land of agricultural and scenic value.
- Cleanup of the Housatonic River for wildlife, human health, and recreational value.
- Ongoing protection of high quality drinking water source.
- Protection of aquifer underlying the Housatonic River.
- Although much of the lands identified by NHESP as BioMap Core Habitat or Priority Conservation Areas, October Mountain and Beartown Mountain are already conserved through a combination of state ownership and land trust efforts, there are gaps in protection along the Coddington Brook watershed and the slopes of Beartown Mountain leading down to Meadow St and Fernside Rd.
- Unprotected Core Habitat and Priority Habitats of Rare Species is found around Laurel Lake and almost the full length of the Housatonic River as it flows south from Golden Hill Rd to the Stockbridge line.

Removal of two existing dams as part of PCB cleanup – an opportunity to create new aquatic linkages.

Within the past decade the Town has experienced little new development and is not faced with the increasing development pressure felt when the resource protection needs were identified in the 1989 Recreation and Open Space Plan. Housing pressures have subsided lately due to high interest rates. Also contributing to a lack of development pressure, employment in town has decreased resulting from four of the last five paper mills in town ceasing operation in 2008. The Town recognizes that the redevelopment of these previously developed sites is a critical component in striking the appropriate balance between both conservation and an aggressive effort to promote economic development. The need and rationale for such a balance is best summarized in the mission statement for the Town's Economic Development Plan and Strategy (1995) which concludes that *"A vital economic base will maintain and increase our quality of life by respecting and contributing to our social and physical setting."*

The Comprehensive Downtown Strategy (CDS) developed by the Lee Community Development Corporation (Lee CDC) encourages the cleanup and redevelopment of blighted and contaminated properties in the downtown area to allow for neighborhood appropriate re-development. As described previously, as former industrial sites each of the mills can be considered a brownfield site. Currently, the presence of brownfields, vacant mills and blighted property detract from the community character of the downtown area and creates a sense of disinvestment, disregard and neglect that discourages investment in the community.

Redevelopment of existing developed lands is preferential to development of marginal lands which would place increasing pressure on the environmentally sensitive areas of Lee, as well as those features that contribute to the character and identity of the Town. While the same development pressures of the 1980s are not a reality today, it is no less important to preserve the agricultural and rural character of the community, the integrity of the hilltops and hillsides, the quality of drinking water and the water relied on for recreation, the continued availability of diverse habitat for wildlife, the continued viability of special environments, including those that support rare and endangered species of plants, and the cultural diversity of the community.

Lee's forests, wetlands, fields and meadows, in combination with extensive holdings of publicly owned land, offer a rare opportunity to develop a network of greenbelts, conservancy areas, nature preserves, and sites for a variety of active and passive recreational purposes. Development of an open space system, that does not threaten the integrity and viability of conservation lands, would also provide a formal mechanism for the management and protection of rare and endangered resources that are scattered throughout the community.

Water Resources

The protection of water resources was ranked as a high resource protection need in the recent community survey. These include the protection of the town's drinking water supply as well as its lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and aquifers.

More than 90% of the community is currently on the public water supply system. One hundred percent (100%) of the Leahey and Schoolhouse Reservoirs' watersheds are protected from development through ownership by the water supplier or as state owned park land. Seventy- six percent (76%) of the Vanetti Reservoir watershed, which is utilized as a back-up supply, is owned by the Lee Water Department, and the remainder is privately-owned forest.

Ground water is not a major source of drinking water for the town, however, there are two major aquifers with a total potential yield of over 3 million gallons per day which could play a role in the long term future of either the town or the region.

Although the Town has adequate drinking water supply to support the needs of the existing community and future redevelopment, the Town's infrastructure is inadequate. In particular is the provision of adequate fire flow water pressure. The existing infrastructure is inadequate to provide the fire flow water pressure required by many redevelopment projects. For example, the existing available fire flows at the Eagle Mill are approximately 2,700 gallons per minute (gpm) and fire flows drop to 1,000 gpm at the southern end of Main Street. In assessing the Eagle Mill redevelopment options, the anticipated fire flows needed for the proposed project is 4,500 gpm. The construction of replacement water lines comprising 11,400 linear feet of new water main running from the town's water treatment facility to the southern end of Main Street could provide fire flows to the Eagle Mill in excess of 4,500 and further improve fire flows within Main Street to 3,500 gpm. These improvements would also benefit the Columbia and Greylock mills fostering private investment in the area while at the same time increasing fire safety generally in the downtown and surrounding area. In addition, the water main improvements would also serve an area of the downtown center that encompasses very attractive redevelopment opportunities which the town has previously identified.

The Conservation Commission takes a very active role in protecting town wetlands, monitoring all types of projects, from the creation of small ponds to building in the vicinity of the wetlands. As more development occurs in marginal areas, there is a higher probability that it may encroach upon wetlands and wet soils. Wetlands serve a variety of purposes that are important to the community. From an economic standpoint, they provide flood storage and, in periods of high water, they may determine whether or not residents will experience serious economic losses because of flooding. This is particularly critical along the Housatonic River where there is a history of severe floods causing significant damage.

Wetlands also provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife. Portions of the Housatonic River floodplain located in the Hop Brook area have been identified as important corridors for migratory birds. Wetlands also contribute to the scenic quality of the community.

The Town is fortunate that the Department of Public Works has recognized the value of Lee's wetland areas and has made a major investment in the acquisition of wetlands in the Hop Brook and Woods Pond areas. There are other sites, however, which are endangered and in need of protection.

Rest of River

Recently, the EPA has announced a transportation plan for PCB laden sediments to be dredged from the Housatonic River. They are accepting public comments through February 2024 on the plan which will span several years.

A site in the town of Lee has been identified by GE as a disposal sites for low concentration PCB-contaminated sediments that will be dredged from the Housatonic Rest of River during cleanup activities.

Many details regarding transport and disposal of PCB materials remain to be negotiated between the town and GE, including temporary storage areas, haul roads or rail transport, dewatering facilities, and loading facilities.

Steep Slopes

Steep slopes are the largest single physical element affecting the future development of the community. With over 37% of town's land mass situated on slopes over 15% in grade, and much of the future new development likely to occur in more marginal areas, soil erosion and sedimentation looms as a very real potential problem. This is all the more likely if one considers the percentage of soils that are classified as "highly erodible" by the Natural Resources Conservation Services.

In response to the need for the protection of steep slopes and scenic views, the Town accepted the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act in 2001. A map of the regulated areas was approved in 2006, and the regulations were formally filed in the Registry of Deeds in 2008. The regulations create uniform procedures regulating removal, filling, clearing of vegetation or other alteration of land within mountain regions designated by the town which are likely to have a significant adverse impact on watershed resources or natural scenic qualities. Adverse effects include the pollution or diminution of ground or surface water supply, erosion, flooding, substantial changes in topographic features, and substantial destruction of vegetation. The regulations define three regions and two zones, which regulate activities based both on elevation and percent slope.

Wildlife and Vegetation

The Town of Lee is fortunate in having ample wildlife habitat at two of the state's largest state forests: October Mountain and Beartown Mountain. These in combination with the Hop Brook Wildlife Management Area provide habitat for a diversity of woodland and wetland wildlife. If there is any real threat, it is to the smaller animals that live along the habitat "edges" between small woods and fields, along the brooks and Housatonic River in the more developed western portion of town. Such areas will become even more fragmented as development continues. Particular attention also needs to be paid to those environments that support rare or endangered species of plants or animals. Monitoring conservation land and removing non-native species before they become a problem and impact native species is strongly recommended. NHESP has identified Priority Conservation Areas that are locally and regionally important to long-term biodiversity

Farmland

The Lee Farmers Market is among 13 weekly farmers markets held between early May and mid-November in the Berkshires. The Town of Lee finds that farming is an essential and valued activity, which provides fresh food, clean air, economic diversity, local employment, and open spaces to all the citizens of Lee. For these reasons, the Town adopted a Right to Farm Bylaw in 2008. The bylaw is intended to encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promote agricultural-based economic and employment opportunities and protect farmland within the Town of Lee. The purpose of the bylaw is to allow agricultural uses and related activities to function in harmony with the community, town agencies and

others. In 2023, Lee became the 50th community in Massachusetts to formally acknowledge the designation of Farmland of Local Importance for crop production.

Working farms and agricultural landscapes contribute significantly to the character and identity of Lee. It is no coincidence that Lee's scenic roads frequently wind through agricultural landscapes or provide panoramic vistas that are largely dominated by farms, meadows or other types of abandoned farmland. This relationship is nowhere more apparent than at High Lawn Farm, a gem that dominates the landscape of the northwestern portion of town.

High Lawn Farm encompasses approximately 1,500 acres approximately 750 acres of which are in Lee, and the remainder are in Stockbridge. Because of its location along their borders, the towns of Stockbridge and Lenox can also be considered stakeholders in this farm. The loss of this farm in particular, but of agricultural landscapes in general, would have a profound impact upon the character and identity of the Lee.

In order to preserve working farms, the issue of economic viability must be addressed. The future of working farms should be addressed in a collaborative manner with landowners and representatives of local and state preservation organizations, economic organizations, and representatives of the town.

Environmental Justice Populations

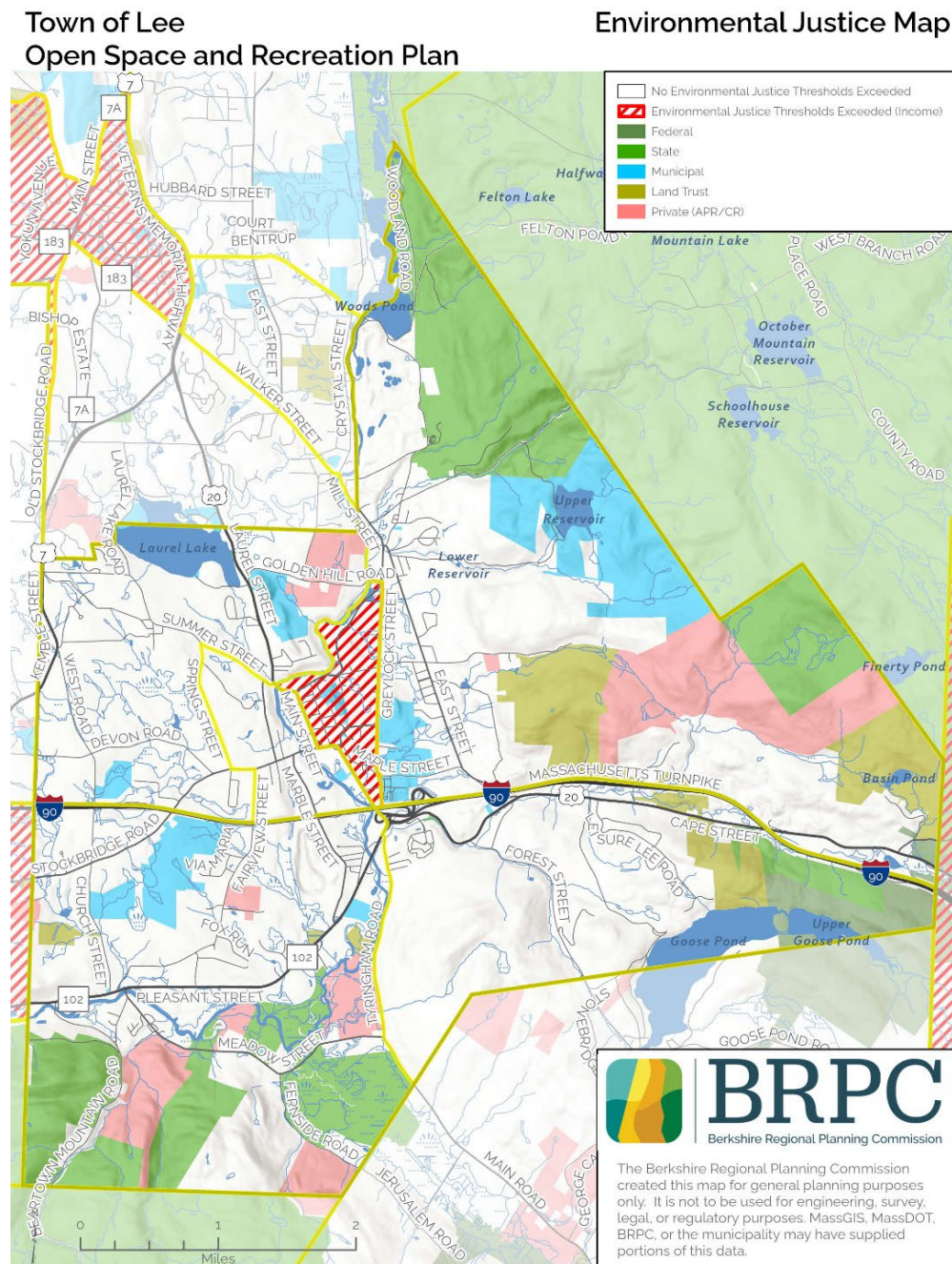
Environmental Justice (EJ) is “based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental pollution, and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment “(Mass. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, 2015). Conceptually, environmental justice recognizes that some of the most highly polluted and undesirable areas to live have tended to contain populations of low-income, minority, foreign-born, and non-English speaking residents. Additionally, these populations have tended to have reduced or limited access to open space. In Massachusetts, these populations have been mapped in each municipality based on Census information. Because these populations have historically been underserved in terms of open space and recreation access and opportunities, they should be a crucial factor in future decision-making regarding these issues.

In Massachusetts, a neighborhood is defined as an EJ population if any of the following are true:

- the annual median household income is not more than 65% of the statewide annual median household income;
- minorities comprise 40% or more of the population;
- 25% or more of households lack English language proficiency; or
- minorities comprise 25% or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150% of the statewide annual median household income.

A small section of the town center has been identified as an Environmental Justice population due to the Income category. The area identified is bound by West Center and Columbia Street to the north, Greylock Street to the east, and Housatonic and Main Streets to the west. This area is one of the most densely developed areas of Lee, often with modest older homes of small lots. This area also includes Crossway Village on High Street, an affordable senior housing complex within the old high school. Ferncliff is adjacent to Crossway Village and a trail links the park to the senior housing. The Town-owned Lee Middle and High School properties and its adjacent open space lands are within a half mile of most of this population, although steep hills existing along some connecting roads, particularly Orchard and Greylock Streets. These properties host a variety of land uses, including playgrounds, athletic fields, open undeveloped lands, trails at Ferncliff, Maple Street Park, and the Fairmount Cemetery. The Lee Athletic Fields equipped with a pavilion and playground, is located just south of the EJ population on Housatonic Street. Although the Town Forest is located a short distance from the EJ neighborhood “as the crow flies,” the public entrance to the park is on the north side, farthest away from the neighborhood. Also, the Housatonic River and steep slopes hinder access from other than the formal entrance. Safe pedestrian access to the access road leading to Sandy Beach is hindered by a gap where there is no sidewalk along upper Laurel Street (Rt. 20). Also, where there is a sidewalk, it is on the east side without a safe way to cross to the west side where the access road is. The fast speeds and heavy commercial and commuter traffic of Laurel Street/Route 20 make crossing the road extremely dangerous for all residents who would like to walk to the beach from the dense residential downtown area.

Figure 19 Environmental Justice Map



Summary of Community Needs

In the autumn of 2022, the Town of Lee began a process to update its master plan, last approved in 2000. As part of the public outreach process, the Town developed and issued a widely distributed public survey (March of 2023) which was made available online and in hard-copy forms. The update of the Lee OSRP was conducted concurrently with the drafting of the updated master plan to ensure that the OSRP reflects and complements the efforts and findings of both planning processes. The public survey included several questions directly linked to open space conservation and outdoor recreation.

A total of 448 surveys were received with respondents answering 1 or more questions and 342 respondents completed the entire survey (answered all questions), a higher return than the previous survey conducted for the last OSRP(225 respondents.) Most respondents to the survey indicated that they were long-time Lee residents 22% of them stating that they have lived in Town more than 40 years, an additional 29% stating that they have lived here 20-40 years, and 11% stating that they have lived here 11-19 years. This indicates that respondents are very familiar with the Town and its history and character. Adults and seniors seem to be well represented in the survey, where 37% reported being age 65 or older and 51% reported being ages 35-64. Regarding annual household income, 19% reported making \$76,000-\$100,000 per year and 38% reported making \$100,000 or more.

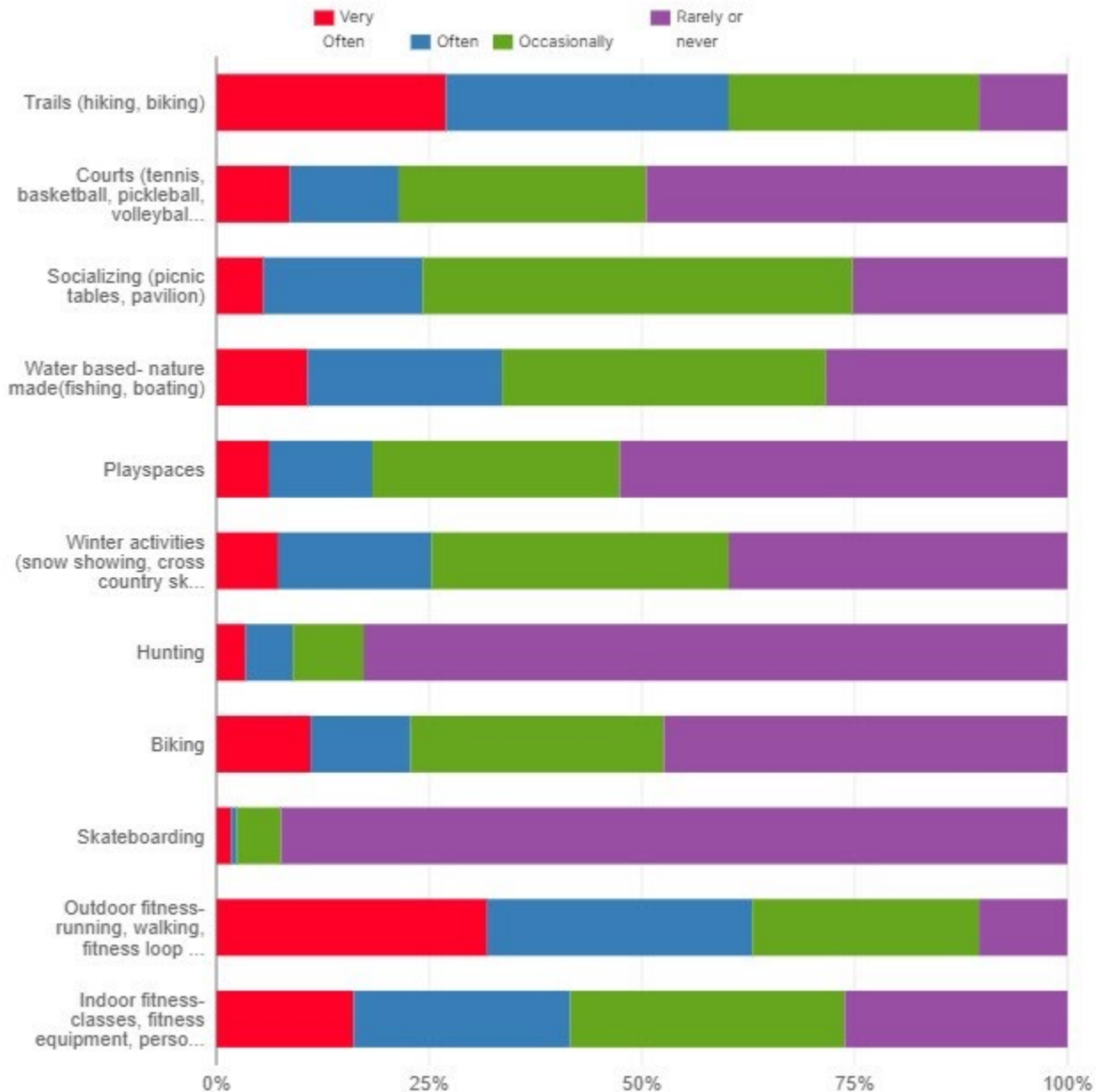
Responses to the survey indicate that the Town's rural character is a main reason that residents live in Lee. When asked to choose what aspects of life in Lee are most important to respondents, the responses "Low crime rate/safe community", "Small town atmosphere", "Nature, wildlife, scenic beauty" were the top three choices respectively. When asked directly if they felt a need to preserve more open space and natural areas in Lee, 64% of the respondents stated yes, 15% stated no, and 21% stating that they had no opinion.

In general, survey respondents were generally satisfied with the open space and outdoor recreational offerings currently existing in Lee, 15% stated Very Satisfied, 61% stated Satisfied, while 24% stated they were Not Satisfied. When asked more specifically about satisfaction for certain age groups, 27% were Unsatisfied with places for children and youth to play and recreate, and a larger percent, 42% was Unsatisfied with places available for adults. These numbers may possibly reflect the demographics of the respondents, where 77% reported being older than 45 years old.

Respondents of the survey were given 11 choices and asked how often they participated in a variety of outdoor and indoor activities. For each activity, the respondents were asked to choose from the following categories: Very Often, Often, Occasionally, or Rarely/Never. When trying to determine the activities undertaken most often, the Very Often and Often categories were combined into one total. Using this method, 182 participants said that the activity chosen most often was Outdoor Fitness (running, walking,

fitness loop or other exercise, 63% of total). Other popular activities that respondents undertake most frequently are Trails (hiking, biking) with 174 votes and Indoor fitness (classes, fitness equipment, personal fitness) with 116 votes.

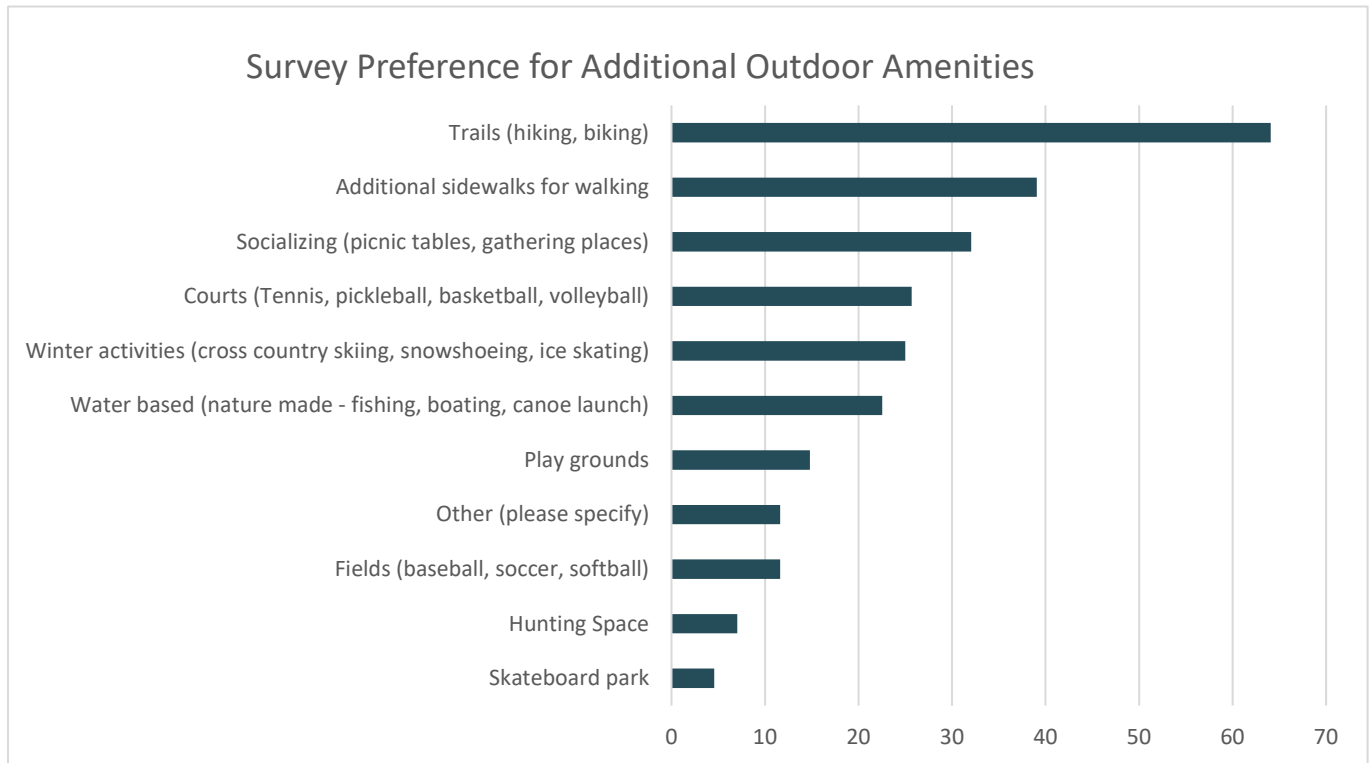
Figure 20 Graph of Lee Survey Respondent’s Frequency of Outdoor/Indoor Activities



Asked to choose up to three choices out of 11 offered activities, respondents were asked about additional outdoor recreation they would like to participate in or see in the town (see Figure 20). Trails for hiking

and biking were selected by 63% of respondents. This is interesting in that respondents indicated that they already undertake this activity frequently. The existing high frequency and future needs may reflect the fact that hiking and biking were listed together in one category, when listing them separately may have yielded a clearer picture of current and future needs. This response for need may reflect a region-wide desire to create safer opportunities for bicycling, as voiced by residents in the neighboring towns of Lenox and Becket when they recently updated their OSRPs. As seen in the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), this desire is echoed across the Commonwealth. The second-most chosen activity that respondents stated they would like to see/participate in were Additional Sidewalks for Walking (39% of total votes), with several open-ended responses asking for facilities on level ground such a walking track, a bike path along the river or sidewalks on specific roads. The third-most popular response was Socializing (picnic tables, gathering places) (32% of total). Other activities with high numbers of votes were Courts (tennis, pickleball, basketball, volleyball) with 26% of votes, Winter Activities (X-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating) with 25% of votes, and Water-based (nature-made fishing, boating, canoe launch, 23%), with several open-ended responses wanting more secure access to swimming at Sandy Beach. The activity that respondents most often undertake Rarely or Never are Skateboarding, Hunting, and Playspaces. A recent Skateboarding Competition held at the town’s skatepark had almost 40 competitors, so support exists in the community for this activity, though it did not show up on the town survey.

Figure 21 Graph of Lee Survey Respondent's Preference for future Outdoor/Indoor Activities



A desire for developing and maintaining hiking trails, improving access, and providing open space linkages between the various town, state and other protected properties was supported by the results of the survey. Included in this is a need to integrate the Housatonic River into the open space network through a greenway. Riverfront Park and the downtown section of the river must be considered prime elements of a broader open space system that will link the downtown with other areas of town and ultimately with the regional open space/recreation network. A natural greenway could be utilized by bicyclists, hikers, canoeists, and for other nature-based activities. Federal and transportation funds are currently being used for the design of a walkway/bikeway along or in close proximity to the Housatonic River.

Nearly ninety-five percent (95%) of the survey respondents indicated it was at least somewhat important to preserve open space for recreation, to preserve ponds, rivers, and streams, to preserve waterfront areas with public access, to preserve wildlife habitat, and to preserve woodlands. This shows that Lee residents strike a balance between conservation and recreation. There appears to be an increased opportunity for appropriate use of the town's conservation lands for passive recreation. This could be pursued by: 1) cooperative initiatives that allow non-detrimental beneficial enjoyment of the natural areas such as the river, 2) efforts to better publicize what is available, and 3) emphasizing their value through environmental education and other programs both in the schools and elsewhere. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

In 2012, the Board of Selectmen recognized the need to address organizational deficiencies in the delivery of recreational services when it re-invigorated the Lee Youth Commission. The Lee Youth Commission has been re-established to advocate for groups providing recreational programming, designed or established, for the youth of Lee. In addition, the Lee Youth Commission may identify additional needs and make appropriate recommendations for future activities. The development of the open space plan led to a recognition that while the Youth Commission does an excellent job coordinating activities for the town's youth, programming for adults and seniors in the community could be more robust. The creation of a parks commission would enable a greater range of activities to be coordinated for all residents of the town.

The Town of Lee has a strong tradition of volunteerism. The recently constructed Garrity-Shields pavilion at the Lee Athletic Field was entirely constructed by volunteer labor and financed with donations from the Garrity and Shields families. Previously, the 6 tennis courts at the Lee Middle and High School were refurbished at a cost of \$85,000, predominantly private contributions. Additionally, the recently conducted Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Opinion survey indicated there is strong interest by respondents to help with a clean-up of litter or trash, participate in a work party or help with maintenance. Efforts to coordinate volunteerism, which typically require a minimum investment, may yield significant results.

Questions 6 and 7 of the survey asked about resident satisfaction with recreational offerings for youth and adults. While the majority of respondents were satisfied with youth offerings (Question 6), many felt that more offerings for adults were needed in the community (Question 7). When asked about mechanisms for protecting open spaces, residents stated that they would like to see the town partner with the state and other non-profits to conserve town land. See Appendix A for more information on the results of the survey.

The ADA evaluation of the town's recreational spaces, conducted as part of this open space and recreation plan, alerted the town that almost all town parks and playing fields need parking and other improvements to increase the universal accessibility of the sites. However, town resources to correct deficiencies are limited. Tackling the improvements on a small but constant basis will be the best course of action for the town. Making sure a handicapped portable toilet is ordered for the most frequently used park sites is an immediate step that can easily be done. Regarding improvements, she suggested focusing first on the parks that serve the greatest number of disabled residents. Parking and pathways should be prioritized to allow disabled persons and seniors to access the parks, and additional improvements, such as handicapped picnic tables and playground equipment, can be addressed after these higher priorities. Lee has made improvements at the Lee athletic fields by installing a handicap-accessible portable toilet, a handicapped swing for young children, wheelchair-accessible ramps to access play areas, and an accessible picnic table.

With the closure of the mills, Lee's economy is undergoing a major transformation. This transformation has put an enormous strain on the town's finances. As Lee aims to provide high-quality services to its residents, it will need to increasingly pursue regional coordination and cooperation to provide those services, which include recreation. Efforts at the regional delivery of services should be pursued.

The PCB clean-up of the Housatonic River offers a tremendous opportunity to recapture the river as a recreational resource. Furthermore, the clean-up of the Housatonic River could help stimulate the re-development of unused or under-utilized properties. Lee should actively pursue its interests in conjunction with the affected adjacent towns to ensure Lee's interests are met with the clean-up of the Housatonic River.

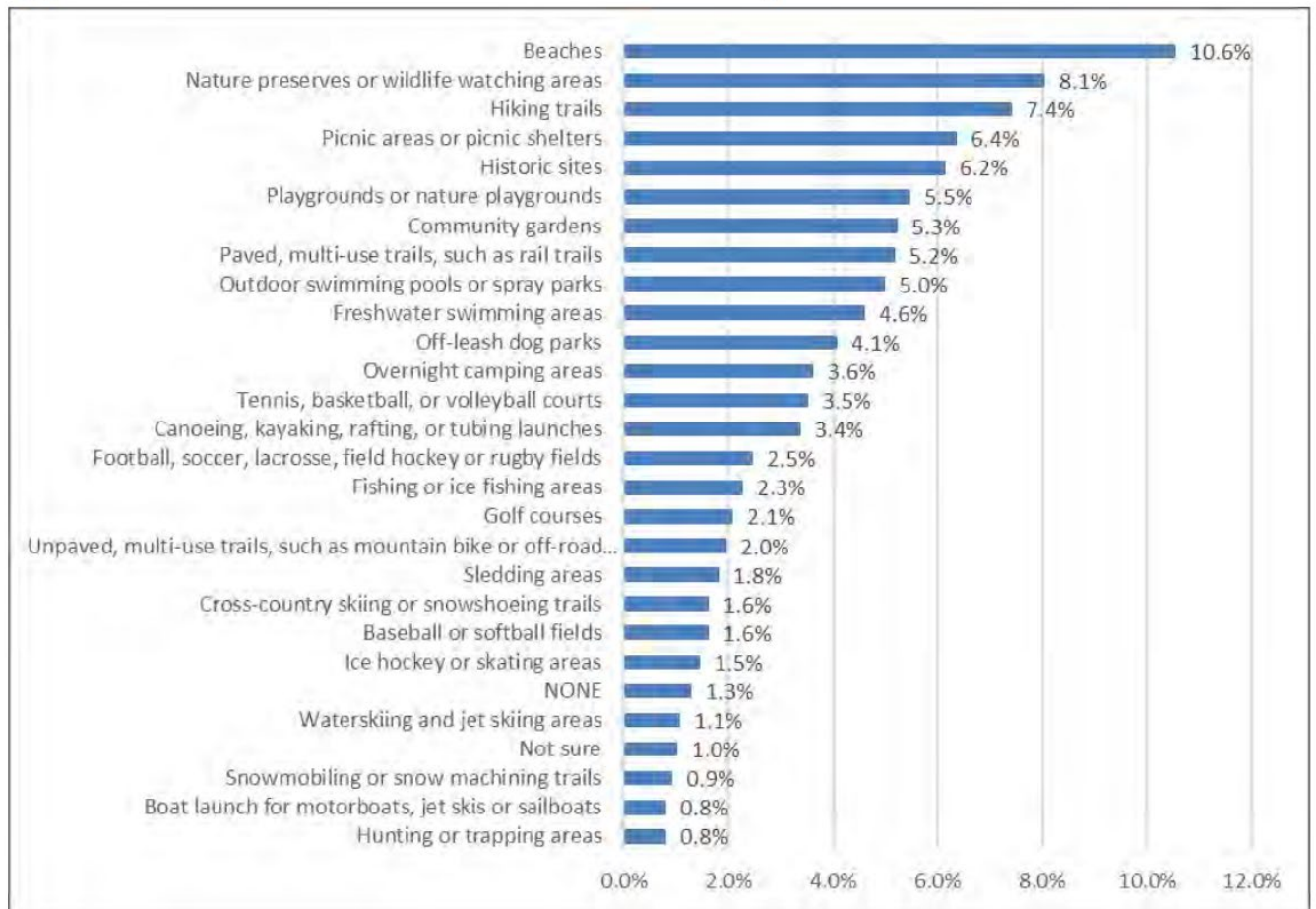
The Massachusetts Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan 2023 (SCORP) provides Massachusetts residents with a framework to guide decision making in the coming five years. The plan is created by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA.) The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) authorized by the Land and Water Act, 1965 Section 6 (d) requires each state to analyze outdoor recreational opportunities. The LWCF Grant Program requires an updated Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every 5 years. The plan was developed using surveys of both municipalities and residents to determine areas of need and improvement. Figures 21-22 show the results of survey work.

- EEA Survey results from 4,895 responses from recreation users indicate that outdoor recreation is extremely important to them (95.1%)
 - Most popular activities included (in order of preference) hiking, walking or jogging, swimming at the beach, lake, or river, boating (canoe or kayak), birding or wildlife viewing, dog walking, and off-road cycling, visiting historic sites, on-road bicycling, and fishing.
 - 62% of respondents said that use of parks and conservation areas increased during the pandemic.
- EEA Survey results from Municipal Recreation Providers indicated that the following recreational activities have been increasing in the last 5-10 years.
 - Top results were (in order of preference) pickleball, walking or jogging, hiking, off-road bicycling, dog walking, mountain biking, birding/wildlife viewing, boating (canoe or kayak), and community gardening.
 - Decreases in popularity were seen in the following activities: baseball/softball, hunting/trapping, tennis, and football.
- Online Survey of households in the state, conducted by ERG.
 - 80% of respondents said that outdoor recreation was important to them.
 - Families with children are more likely to identify outdoor recreation as extremely important.
 - Walking, visiting the beach, and hiking were the top three favorite activities.
 - Walking and running were the most frequent activities.
 - 26% of respondents stated that they take advantage of outdoor areas and facilities.
 - 46% of respondents stated that they lived within 5 miles of a recreational facility.
 - When asked what outdoor recreational facilities they would like to see more of, respondents stated that they would like Beaches (10.6%), nature preserves or wildlife watching areas (8.1%), and hiking trails (7.4%)

The 2023 SCORP defines the following goals and objectives, defined by survey results.

1. Improve access to beaches and other water-based recreation facilities
2. Support Trail Projects
3. Create and Renovate Neighborhood parks, especially to benefit underserved communities.
 - a. All respondents said that they would like to see additional picnic facilities
 - b. African American and Hispanic respondents were more likely to live five to ten miles from the outdoor recreation facility they use the most.
 - c. African American respondents report visiting their favorite outdoor recreation areas more than once/week, the highest of any group.
4. Create opportunities for underserved populations to enjoy protected natural areas.

Figure 22- Results of SCORP Survey



The results of the Lee survey show similar findings to those described in the 2023 SCORP. Residents stated that the greatest need in the community was for additional hiking and biking trails, followed by additional sidewalks, more gathering places with picnic tables, courts for tennis, pickleball, basketball, and volleyball, and additional opportunities for fishing, boating, kayaking, and canoeing.

By aligning town recreation goals with the statewide goals presented in the SCORP, the town increases the likelihood of receiving grant funding to implement those projects.

Goals and Objectives

1. Residents want to ensure that land use decisions balance quality of life, social and economic needs and improve the quality of the environment.

Objective: Protect water resources, habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas.

2. Townspeople would like to encourage development that utilizes existing infrastructure, encourages neighborhood character while discouraging sprawl, and enhances the pedestrian and bicycle network in the town.

Objective: Establish bike paths and trails that provide connection within the town and with neighboring communities.

3. Lee has a wealth of water resources available to the citizens, including Upper and Lower Goose Ponds, Laurel Lake, the Housatonic River, and Woods Pond. Remediation of PCB contamination in the Housatonic River threatens scenic and fragile environmental areas in the town.

Objective: Monitor the status of Housatonic River Cleanup (or rest of river cleanup.)

4. Recreational opportunities and open spaces contribute to community interaction and quality of life. Lee's strong sense of community remains an important defining characteristic.

Objective: Expand awareness and support of existing parks and open space properties.

5. The Town has an extensive inventory of protected open space including many acres under local, state, and federal ownership. During the summer of 2023, the town became an Appalachian Trail Community. Local conservation organizations like the Lee Land Trust, Trustees, and Berkshire Natural Resources Council maintain publicly accessible properties for passive recreation in the town.

Objective: Expand awareness and support of existing parks and open space properties.

6. Lee is fortunate to have extensive outdoor recreation facilities for both active and passive recreation. Focusing on environmental education and linking protected town lands into an open space system are ways to ensure that the conservation attributes of the land are met while increasing the use and enjoyment by town residents.

Objective: Manage invasive species in the town.

7. Creating a Lee Parks and Recreation Department and utilizing the Lee Youth Commission to oversee/coordinate parks activities throughout the town could enhance these parks and open space efforts.

Objective: Enhance town parks and open spaces.

8. Lee is deficient in meeting many of the recreational needs of its population. Particular attention needs to be paid to the development of recreation programs for all age groups and to the maintenance of its facilities, including the provision of modern, safe equipment that is accessible to all people, especially those with disabilities.

Objective: Expand awareness and support of existing parks and open space properties.

9. Lee is pursuing an active economic development and re-development program. The Eagle Mill Redevelopment is one example of a project recently initiated in the town. Other former mills remain closed and underutilized. Economic development and re-development efforts must preserve sensitive environmental resources while utilizing town infrastructure and brownfield sites.

Objective: Protect water resources, habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas.

10. More development will occur on marginal lands as the town gets closer to buildout. This will bring many environmentally sensitive areas into jeopardy. Much of the Lee landscape is vulnerable because of its geology, soils, and topography.

11. *Objective: Preserve farmland and pastures.*

12. Cooperative efforts will broaden existing and future resource offerings and assets. Partnering with non-profit and conservation organizations will help ensure this plan and other related efforts will be successfully implemented.

Objective: Expand awareness and support of existing parks and open space properties

Figure 24 Orange Peel Fungus, Golden Hill Town Forest

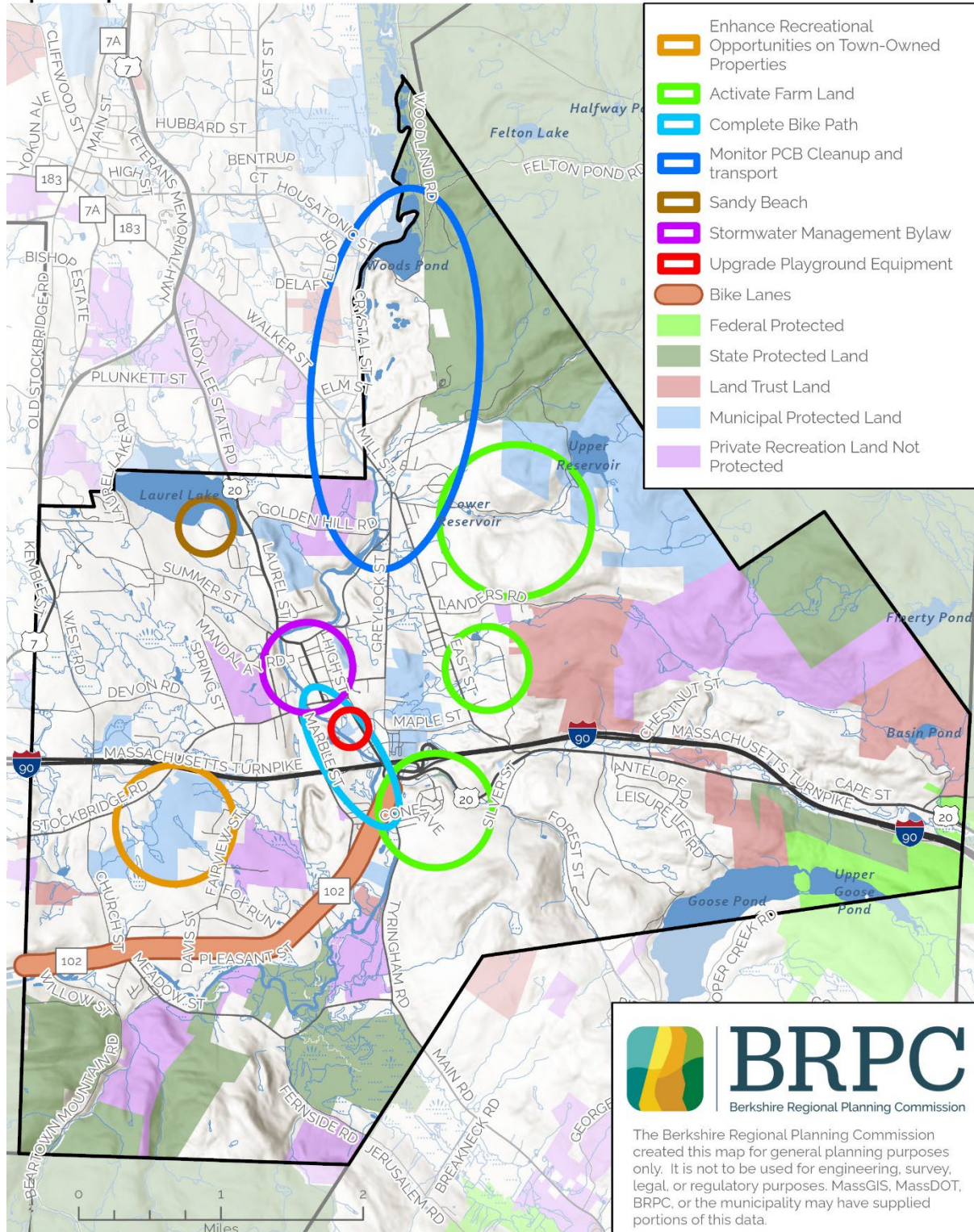
Photo Credit: Linda Cysz



Figure 25 Lee Open Space and Recreation Plan Action Map

Town of Lee
Open Space and Recreation Plan

Action Map



Seven Year Action Plan

Open Space and Recreation Seven Year Action Plan								
Priority Number	Task #		Activity	Responsible Entity	Time Frame	Cost to the Town	Potential Funding Source	
	O.1	Goal	Support the protection of sensitive natural resources and agricultural resources					
	O.1.1	Objective	Monitor the status of Housatonic River Cleanup (or "Rest of River" cleanup)					
High	O.1.1.1	Action	Hire consultants to assist the Town in evaluating plans for the removal, transportation, and storage of PCBs	Select Board, residents, Board of Health	Ongoing	\$-\$\$	Community One Stop for Growth, Federal 604b Water Quality Management Planning Grant Program, Natural Resources Damages Program Restoration Funds,	
	O.1.2	Objective	Protect water resources, habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas					
High	O.1.2.1	Action	Evaluate whether the town's waterbodies, watercourses, and water supply areas are adequately protected by existing regulations	Conservation Commission	0-5 years	n/a-\$	Community One Stop for Growth, Planning Assistance Grant, Land use Planning Grants	
Medium	O.1.2.2	Action	Develop a stormwater management bylaw to require adequate mitigation measures in relation to land disturbance and new development	Conservation Commission, Planning Board	0-3 years	n/a-\$	Section 319 Nonpoint Source Competitive Grants Program, Stormwater MS4 Municipal Assistance Grant Program	
Medium	O.1.2.3	Action	Establish additional canoe/kayak access points	Conservation Commission, Local Land Trusts, DPW, citizens	2-7 years	\$-\$\$	Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities Program, MassTrails Program,	
Medium	O.1.2.4	Action	Partner with the state and land conservation agencies to identify opportunities for preserving open space	Conservation Commission, Local Land Trusts, citizens	Ongoing	\$-\$\$	Landscape Partnership Program, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity, Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants	
High	O.1.2.5	Action	Consider protections to provide buffers for critical resource areas. Maintain wildlife habitats and corridors through appropriate management of public spaces and land use permitting related to the use of private property.	Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Local Land Trusts, citizens	Ongoing	\$	Landscape Partnership Program, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity, Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants	
Medium	O.1.2.6	Action	Partner with governmental entities and conservation-focused organizations to preserve forests, agricultural lands, especially those containing sensitive natural features, including flora and fauna	Town Administrator, Town Planner, Community Preservation Committee	Ongoing	\$-\$\$\$	Landscape Partnership Program, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity, Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants	
	O.1.3	Objective	Preserve farmland and pastures					
Medium	O.1.3.1	Action	Educate residents of the availability of programs to protect existing agricultural operations and land	Agricultural Commission, Local Land Trusts, Greener Gateway Committee, local	Ongoing	\$	Federal State Marketing Improvement Program, Buy Local Grant Program	
Medium	O.1.3.2	Action	Identify opportunities to convert former agricultural lands back into active use	Agricultural Commission, Local Land Trusts, local farms, citizens	Ongoing	\$	Farm Viability Enhancement Program, APR Improvement Program, Stewardship Assistance and Resoration on APRs, Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture Program, Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program	
Medium	O.1.3.3	Action	Retain and expand the potential for recreation, conservation, or agricultural use at 300 Stockbridge Road	Town Planner, Select Board, Agricultural Commission, Local Land Trusts, local farms, citizens	0-5 years	\$	Landscape Partnership Program, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity, Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants	
Medium	O.1.3.4	Action	Utilize CPA funds to protect valuable open spaces	CPA Committee, Town Planner/Administrator, Lee Youth Commission	Ongoing	\$-\$\$	Community Preservation Act	

2024 Lee Open Space and Recreation Plan

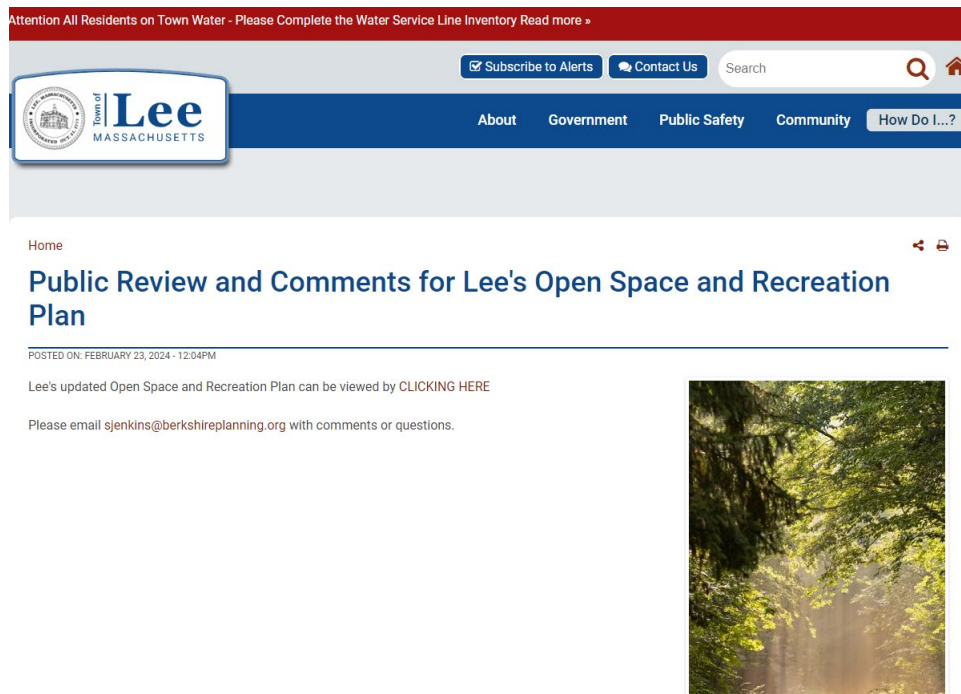
0.1.4		Objective	Manage invasive species in town				
High	O.1.4.1	Action	Develop an inventory and management plan for the removal of invasive species and encourage the use of native and pollinator friendly plantings in public and private projects.	DPW, Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Local Land Trusts, Greener Gateway Committee, local farms, citizens	Ongoing	\$-\$	Landscape Partnership Program, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity, Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants, Natural Resource Damages Program Restoration Funds
Medium	O.1.4.2	Action	Raise awareness of invasive species to residents through the Town's efforts and marketing materials	Greener Gateway, Local Schools, Local Land Trusts,	Ongoing	\$	Natural Resource Damages Program Restoration Funds
0.2		Goal	Provide active and passive outdoor recreation for all residents of all ages and abilities				
0.2.1		Objective	Expand awareness and support of existing parks and open space properties				
Low	O.2.1.1	Action	Develop a plan for environmental education for residents of all ages to promote stewardship and volunteerism	Greener Gateway, Local Schools, Local Land Trusts,	1-3 years	\$	Connecting Activities Competitive Grant Program
Low	O.2.1.2	Action	Develop promotional materials that highlight the town's active and passive recreational opportunities, as well as rules for use of spaces with the Lee Department of Public Works.	Town Planner, Lee Youth Commission, Lee Department of Public Works	2-5 years	\$	Elementary and Secondary Education Grants, Connecting Activities Competitive Grant Program
0.2.2		Objective	Enhance Town Parks and Open Space				
High	O.2.2.1	Action	Consider the creation of a Parks and Recreation Department and evaluate the role of existing town bodies such as the Lee Youth Commission and the Sandy Beach Committee as part of this effort.	Select Board, Town Administrator, Town Planner, DPW, Lee Youth Commission, Sandy Beach Committee	0-3 years	n/a	Planning Assistance Grant, Community One Stop Grant Program
Medium	O.2.2.2	Action	Provide paid staff support to track the use of town parks and open space, coordinate volunteer efforts, and coordinate needs with the Lee Department of Public Works and Lee Youth Commission	Select Board, Town Administrator	1-3 years	\$	None
Medium	O.2.2.3	Action	Recruit individual and organizational volunteers to share responsibility of the maintenance and cleanup of parks, trails, and publicly accessible forest land.	Town Administrator, Select Board	Ongoing	n/a	MassTrails Program
High	O.2.2.4	Action	Provide adequate access and amenities for recreational spaces, including easily accessible access points, parking, seating, picnic tables, and signage.	Town Administrator, Lee Youth Commission, Greener Gateway Committee, DPW, citizens	Ongoing	\$\$	Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities Program
Medium	O.2.2.5	Action	Support capital investments, maintenance, and staffing at Sandy Beach	Sandy Beach Committee, Select Board, Highlawn Farm, Dam/Access property owners, Town Administrator, Town Planner, DPW	Ongoing	\$\$	Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities Program
High	O.2.2.6	Action	Budget for sufficient maintenance and capital improvements for existing recreational facilities	Town Planner, Select Board, residents	Ongoing	\$\$\$	Communiyt One Stop for Growth
Medium	O.2.2.7	Action	Create programs for all age groups and abilities	Lee Youth Commission, Council on Aging, Sandy Beach Committee, Greener Gateway Committee, Select Board, residents	Ongoing	\$\$\$	Communiyt One Stop for Growth
0.2.3		Objective	Establish bike paths and trails that provide connections in the Town of Lee and with neighboring communities				
High	O.2.3.1	Action	Complete the proposed bike path/river walk south of Park Street and advocate for an earlier release of funding to allow for project construction.	Town Administrator, Town Planner	Ongoing	\$	MassTrails Program, Complete Streets,
Medium	O.2.3.2	Action	Pursue opportunities to provide bike path and bike lane connectivity within the Town of Lee and with neighboring communities	DPW, Town Planner	Ongoing	n/a-\$\$\$	MassTrails Program, Complete Streets,
Medium	O.2.3.3	Action	Work with MassDOT to maintain and improve bike lanes on Route 102	Mass DOT, DPW, Town Planner	Ongoing	\$	Complete Streets, Shared Streets Program
Medium	O.2.3.4	Action	Promote Lee's designation as an Appalachian Trail Community	Appalachian Trail Committee, Local Land Trusts, Greener Gateway Committee, DPW	Ongoing	\$	Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Medium	O.2.3.5	Action	Identify opportunities to provide connections between recreational areas	Select Board, Town Administrator, DPW, residents, nearby communities	Ongoing	\$\$\$	Complete Streets, Shared Streets Program

Public Comments

Copies of the draft *Open Space and Recreation Plan* were posted on the Town of Lee's website and at the Lee Library and in the Town Clerk's office. During the development of the plan, the Open Space and Recreation Committee received comments from the Lee Planning Board, the Lee Conservation Commission, the Lee Youth Commission, and other town committees and boards. The Committee also received comments from members of the Lee Land Trust and several individual residents. These comments were incorporated into the final draft plan that was offered for public review in March of 2024.

The public provided direct feedback to the Committee at the public forum, via email and by leaving hand-written comments at the Lee Library. Several individuals took the time to review the plan and provide constructive feedback. The notice of public comment on the draft appeared on the town's website and is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 26 Screenshot of Public Comment Review Period on town website.



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Appendices

- A. Survey and Survey Results
- B. Lee ADA Self Evaluation
- C. Volunteer Efforts in Parks Maintenance and Improvement