

WILDERNESS PROTECTION IN THE ROUTE 120 CORRIDOR

The Route 120 Corridor in Lebanon and Hanover contains extraordinary wilderness areas of astounding beauty and ruggedness, with habitats harboring an exceptional richness of wildlife. Although commercial and residential developments are prevalent along the major roadways (Rt. 120, Greensboro Road and Great Hollow Road), the interior contains more than 500 acres of contiguous forest with diverse habitats and natural features. It is truly a unique landscape worthy of protection.

With further development slated for this growing area, many residents attended public meetings in 2007 and 2008 to expressed their desire to protect the “wild” areas in this corridor. Both Lebanon and Hanover residents voiced their support for this ecologically and geologically diverse area, and their commitment to maintaining its environmental quality.

The Hanover Conservation Council is a nonprofit, membership organization which has been active in land conservation in Hanover since the early 1960s. We recognize the ecological value of the 120 Corridor, and strongly agree with the many residents committed to its protection. The Hanover Conservation Council envisions the permanent conservation of this core interior wilderness area with its diverse flora and fauna, fragile wetlands, critical wildlife corridors, and distinctive geological features. To that end, we have begun working to forge partnerships, facilitate discussions, and begin the necessary steps to make this happen for the future of our communities.

This is a unique opportunity for our two communities to work together to maintain the integrity of this special wilderness. Bears, birds and other wildlife have no concern for town boundaries as they move about the forest. Let us not limit our conservation actions by some line on a map.

THE LAND

It is astounding that there are, so close to our town centers, lands with qualities we generally associate with much more extensive and remote wilderness. Fortunately, the ruggedness of these areas and long-term stable ownership have protected them from major disturbances in the past.

The core wilderness areas of the 120 Corridor are bordered by 3 major roads: Rte 120, Greensboro Road and Great Hollow Road (see map). The northern part of the 120 Corridor drains to Mink Brook, the southern part to the Mascoma River, and both of these flow to the Connecticut River. This large interior forested area includes Mt. Support, Rix Ledges, many wetlands that support rare species, large boulders and outcrops, and an incredibly diverse terrain.

A network of adjacent conservation lands provide habitat corridors for wildlife, and increase the conservation value of the Route 120 Corridor. These neighboring conservation lands include the Appalachian Trail, Mink Brook Nature Preserve in Hanover and Indian Ridge, Landmark Tract, and Boston Lot Lake in Lebanon.

A. THE CASE FOR LAND PROTECTION:

There are several reports (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, NH Fish and Game) which document the many wetland areas, minor streams, rich deciduous forests, high quality wildlife habitat, rare plants and unusual rock formations in the Rt. 120 corridor. Noteworthy features include:

- Quality habitat and populations of bear, moose, bobcats and other mammals, characteristic of wilderness areas in New England
- Exemplary bog and acidic seepage swamp habitats
- Barrens strawberry – a state threatened rare plant
- Stream edges include hemlock talus forests and mixed hardwood deciduous forests
- Extensive forested wetlands with streams flowing north to Mink Brook
- Glacial erratics, boulder fields, ridges, rock faces and amphitheaters
- Extensive bands of maidenhair fern, rattlesnake plantain and cathedral pines.
- Examples of near-old-growth trees in remote areas

Furthermore, the 2008 NH Fish and Game Department report emphasizes that land conservation efforts are critical for the significant wildlife movement that takes place in the corridor.

B. CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

HCC feels that community plans must protect core wilderness areas, and separate wilderness from commercial and residential developments with adequate buffer zones. We encourage the use of “smart growth” principles which concentrate buildings near existing infrastructure and conserve open lands and access routes that minimize environmental damage. Project planning must consider these objectives.

- Core wilderness areas in the 120 Corridor must be protected from disturbance and increased development.
- Creating and preserving wildlife corridors in the interior and across roads and developed areas.
- Buffering streams and protecting water quality.
- Protecting Mount Support and Rix Ledges. These are important examples of geologically uplifted lands with very dramatic topography. This accentuates their remote wilderness character.
- Any public access trails should be kept at a minimum and be near developments, avoiding the most sensitive lands.

CONCLUSION

It is essential to develop an overarching plan for future developments in the 120 Corridor. We need to think beyond our human town boundaries and avoid piecemeal development approvals to define the overall character of this unique area. The Hanover Conservation Council supports the conservation of this large, core wilderness and its many sensitive lands, while development moves forward under smart growth principles. The Hanover Conservation Council will continue to bring stakeholders together in an effort to carry out this vision.