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## SECTION

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### INTRODUCTION

Montague's first Open Space and Recreation Plan was prepared in 1987. Since that time, the Town's population increased slightly. Approximately 320 new homes have been built. Several major manufacturing facilities have closed, while others have opened in the town's first Industrial Park. A coal-fired power plant opened, then closed in an historic industrial area along the Connecticut River. Residents considered and rejected funding for a regional landfill. Severe storms increased awareness and concern about flood damage and erosion.

Perhaps more remarkable than the changes, however, is the extent to which Montague has remained the same for the past decade and a half. While there has been scattered development of a few homes on large lots on Dry Hill and Chestnut Hill, the vast majority of Montague east of Route 63 remains forested and undeveloped. More than 1,400 acres of the Montague Plains and hundreds of acres of farmland and open space have been permanently protected from development. There are still at least twenty working farms in town. Montague's five villages retain their distinct character. Quantity and quality of groundwater supplies appears to be high. Water quality in the Connecticut and Millers Rivers is improving. Wildlife is abundant in rural areas of town, and publicly-owned lands offer exceptional opportunities for outdoor recreation. Several long-term projects related to natural resource protection and recreation, including a bike path and a natural history interpretive center, have been completed. Montague residents still enjoy the great wealth of agricultural, natural, scenic and recreational resources catalogued in the Town's first Open Space and Recreation Plan.



It would be satisfying to attribute the abundance of open space and integrity of natural resources in Montague today to careful planning in the past. Past planning efforts and advocacy from residents *have* played a role in maintaining the town's rural character, but the Town has also been fortunate. It has been fortunate that many property owners have voluntarily chosen to practice farming and forestry and protect their land from development, and that development pressure has been lower than in other towns in the area. That fortune is unlikely to last forever.

In 2010, property values in Montague are relatively lower than some surrounding communities, presenting an opportunity for the Town to protect natural, agricultural, and

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recreational resources before development pressure builds. The scenic beauty of Montague's rural landscape is probably a significant draw for new residents. Farms continue to struggle to operate viable businesses, however the growth of "buy local" campaigns have helped support local agriculture. Fiscal constraints threaten the Town's ability to provide recreational programs and facilities for its residents. While economic trends shift quickly, a few years of strong development pressure can have major and permanent impacts on the landscape. Montague residents need only look to town's to the south to see how quickly the rural character of a town can disappear.

### **A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

Rather than leave Montague's natural, agricultural and recreational resources to good fortune and the good will of landowners, Montague residents have chosen to plan for the future of the places they value. This Open Space and Recreation Plan is intended to map and document the extent and quality of Montague's natural, agricultural and recreational resources and establish their importance from local and regional perspectives. Its recommendations are designed to protect these resources for future generations.

This plan is not intended as a comprehensive strategy for land use in the Town of Montague. Rather, it is designed to supplement the Comprehensive Plan developed and approved by the Planning Board in 1999. It is important to note that while this document focuses on the need for protection of land and natural resources, it is critically important that the Town continue to prepare and implement strategies for residential, commercial and industrial development. Identifying appropriate areas for development and promoting policies to create new housing and business growth in these areas will help remove pressure to develop land that is valuable for agriculture, forestry, conservation and recreation.

### **B. PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Development of the 2010 Montague Open Space and Recreation Plan was supervised by the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee, a volunteer committee representing various Town boards and departments, special districts, and resident needs and perspectives. The 2010 update was a collaborative effort between the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. Committee members are listed at the beginning of the plan.

The original 2003 Open Space and Recreation Plan was developed through a public process involving many committee meetings, a community survey, multiple public meetings, and a public forum. The process for the 2010 update included a new community survey on the Town's open space and recreation needs, as well as six committee meetings where drafts of chapters were reviewed and revised. These meetings were held between September 2009 and October 2010. A public forum of the draft plan was held on September 23, 2010. The forum was advertised in the local newspaper and



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on the Montague town website, where a draft version of the plan was made available prior to the forum. Fliers were placed throughout the five villages, at libraries, parks and businesses. Enhanced outreach was conducted in the Environmental Justice Population area of Turners Falls, where ten fliers were posted in the village in addition to town hall. Locations were at light posts along Avenue A, the Peskeomskut Park Bulletin Board, Unity Park, Great Falls Discovery Center, and outside the Food City grocery store. Goals were revised based on input from committee members and the public, and a seven-year action plan was drafted.