

# Natchaug Basin Conservation Action Planning

Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Mansfield, Union, Willington, Windham, Woodstock (Connecticut)



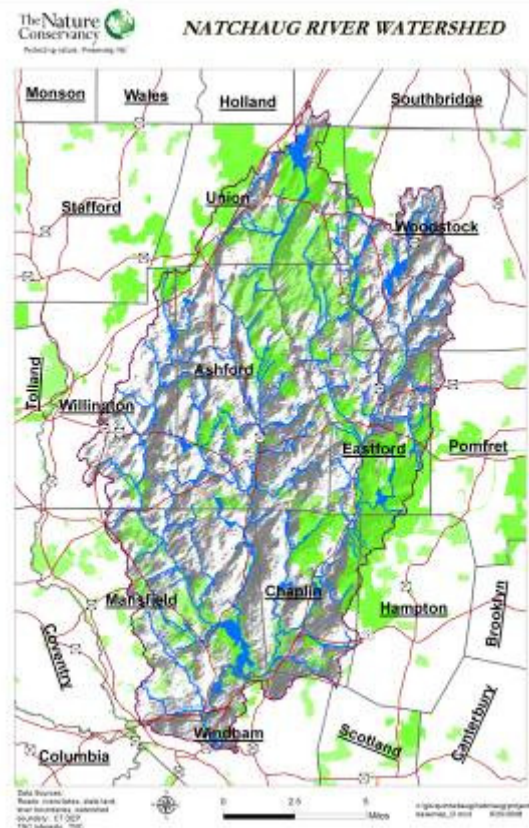
The Natchaug River is recognized by federal, state, local and private agencies as a benchmark stream for water quality and its basin contains a rich diversity of aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals. The three mainstem rivers of the Natchaug Basin - the Fenton, Mount Hope, and Natchaug Rivers make up the 114,000-acre Natchaug Basin. The basin supports the largest public surface drinking water supply watershed in Connecticut, supplying 22,000 consumers in Willimantic and Mansfield, the majority of the University of Connecticut water system which supports approximately 25,000 students, faculty and staff and additional consumers in the Storrs area. Approximately 18,000 residents of the basin are dependent on private wells. The Natchaug Basin is largely rural, more than 75% forested with very high water quality valued for drinking water, wildlife habitat, recreation, history and beauty.

Much of the land within the watershed is held by the State of Connecticut, US Army Corps of Engineers flood control facility, private land trusts and large private land owners. The natural ecological condition and the services provided to communities within the Basin depend on its continued high quality. Although the watershed is located in the "Last Green Valley" between Washington and Boston there is significant urban and suburban development pressure from these expanding cities threatening the ecological condition of these high quality streams.

To implement on-the-ground conservation a series of three stakeholder meetings in the Natchaug Basin called "Conservation Action Planning for the Natchaug Basin" were conducted. Meetings addressed the protection of the ecological systems used by plants, animals and people and generated regional strategies and measures for protection of aquatic resources in the Natchaug Basin.

The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Action Planning (CAP) process includes the following steps:

1. Identify conservation targets and assess their condition or ecological viability.
2. Identify and rank the primary threats affecting the overall condition of the watershed systems
3. Define strategies to specifically address the threats and restoration needs of the conservation targets.
4. Create a document which assigns measurable actions and dates specific to each strategy, to determine if our strategies are working and if not, why.



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## **Ecological Targets of the Natchaug Basin:**

1. Main Stem Rivers
2. Headwater Streams and Wetland Complexes
3. Cold Water Fish and Mussels
4. Lakes and Ponds
5. Aquifers and Groundwater Recharge
6. Forests
7. Grasslands

## **Critical Threats:**

1. Incompatible Residential or Commercial Development
2. Incompatible Road Construction and Maintenance
3. Incompatible (excessive or inappropriately timed) Groundwater Withdrawal
4. Incompatible Dams and Dam Maintenance

## **Strategies and Action Items:**

- 1) Identify and convene a steering committee to engage stakeholders, elicit endorsement for and adopt the Natchaug Basin Conservation Action Plan.
  - a) Create regional or inter-municipal compact to be signed by all municipalities and appropriate partners
- 2) Conduct outreach and education to ensure land use decision makers understand the importance of the Natchaug Basin.
  - a) Create outreach sub-committee to identify outreach and education opportunities
  - b) Create Natchaug Basin "brand"
- 3) Implement a watershed wide mechanism for balancing conservation and economic growth in ecologically suitable segments of the basin.
  - a) Identify sub-committee
  - b) Inventory and identify opportunities for municipal zoning code improvements for the protection of conservation targets.
  - c) Identify critical conservation lands for protection of ecological targets
  - d) Promote municipal land use regulations that protect ecological targets
- 4) Ensure adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the protection and conservation of ecological targets.
  - a) Identify sub-committee
  - b) Develop a dashboard manual for town public works staff and CONNDOT outlining environmentally friendly road maintenance practices
  - c) Inventory storm water infrastructure and needs in each town - beginning with one pilot town (to be identified)