

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

*"Shall provide an inventory of the significant natural resource areas such as water, soils, prime agricultural lands, natural vegetation systems, wildlife, wetlands, aquifers, coastal features, floodplains and other natural resources and the policies for the protection and management of such areas. The element shall include policies for the protection of historic and cultural resources of the municipality and the state. The policies and implementation techniques must be identified for inclusion in the implementation program element." -- Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act*

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Little Compton is rich in natural resources: shorelines with some of the finest beaches and natural harbors, scenic open spaces, valuable wetlands, high quality surface water, prime agricultural lands and unique historical areas. The Town's natural environment adds immeasurably to its quality of life. Although many large areas of undeveloped land exist in Little Compton, these lands, including land currently devoted to farming, are feeling direct and indirect impacts from residential and other forms of development. Development impacts not only affect land use but all natural resources such as ground water and air quality. Proper use and protection of natural resources may require greater initial expense, but it is generally far less costly to anticipate environmental problems and take measures to avoid them than to correct past mistakes. Certain resources, such as groundwater, are jointly owned and require a community-wide and multi-town effort to ensure that its quality is maintained and improved where possible. Other resources, such as clean air, must be protected on a regional and statewide basis. Compliance with federal and state standards, including monitoring of air quality, become important factors in the overall protective measures within the scope of this element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Among the unique characteristics of the Town are its open spaces and natural beauty, the type of which has been lost to development in other communities in Rhode Island. The sense of openness in the Town is due to the considerable number of active farms. Yet, while the casual observer may note the beauty and harmony of the area, much of the natural resources in Little Compton are not protected in perpetuity. Indeed, most of the Town is susceptible to development as rising property values continue to spur more intensive land uses.

Fortunately, the Town has recognized that choices are available; planning for the future is an option to manage the growth of the Town and preserve valuable parts of the land for recreation, conservation and agricultural purposes.

### **5.1.a Purpose**

The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act requires that this element "provide an inventory of the significant natural resource areas such as water, soils, prime agricultural lands, natural vegetation systems, wildlife, wetlands, aquifers, coastal features, floodplains and other natural resources and the policies for protection and management of such areas. The element shall include policies for the protection of historic and cultural resources of the municipality and the state. The policies and implementation techniques must be identified for inclusion in the implementation program." This element considers the nature of the environment, the ability of the Town's natural resources to support future development, the impact the Town's current regulations have upon the environment, and how the resources can be best protected in the future.

The element also considers the Town's cultural resources, an amalgam of ethnic, occupational, institutional, geographic and social elements. The Town's historical heritage continues to influence the present character of the community, and this element considers the importance of preserving the Town's past while serving a modern purpose. The first section of this element addresses the community's natural resources, followed by its cultural and historical resources.

### **5.2 Natural Resources**

The Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island is located in Newport County, approximately thirty-two (32) miles southeast of Providence, R.I. and twelve (12) miles south of Fall River, Massachusetts. Bounded by the Town of Tiverton, R. I. to the north, Massachusetts to the east, the Atlantic Ocean to the south and the Sakonnet River to the west, the Town comprises approximately 14,848 acres or 23.2 square miles. Little Compton has a population of approximately 3,339 full time residents and approximately 2,688 summer residents.<sup>1</sup> The Town is characterized as a rural community with numerous active farms, forested areas and open meadows. Industry consists primarily of agriculture and fishing with small scale neighborhood-serving commercial activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Selected Population and Housing Characteristics: L990, Little Compton town, Newport County, Rhode Island, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

The existing and potential future impacts that are imposed upon the Town's natural and cultural resources by increased development are numerous. The very elements which drew residents to the community face disruption and in some cases, destruction, by increasing demands placed on them by the growing year round and seasonal population. Mitigating the effects of human habitation on the Town's natural resources while providing a balanced climate in which residents can live, work and play is the challenge of this Plan element.

### 5.2.a Natural Features

The natural features of Little Compton, combined with its cultural context, help to create the unique character of the Town. This subsection presents a synopsis of the natural features and some of the management implications relating to these features. The following figures describe the general geographic status of the community:<sup>2</sup>

#### Area

Total	23.2 square miles
Land area	21.6 square miles
Inland water	1.6 square miles

#### Climate

Mean Temperature in January	29.2 degrees
Mean Temperature in July	70.2 degrees
Mean Annual Precipitation	37.9 inches

United States Geological Survey Quadrangles:	Sakonnet Point, Tiverton, and Westport
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### 5.3 Water Resources

Little Compton's water resources include rainfall, streams, freshwater ponds and reservoirs, freshwater wetlands, and coastal ponds and wetlands. Water resources are of paramount concern in Little Compton, since every resident depends upon groundwater for domestic use, and the City of Newport depends, in part, upon the Watson Reservoir for its drinking water supply. These resources are critical to the future functioning of Little Compton in terms of providing a continued safe drinking water supply, flood storage capacity, wildlife habitat, as well as secondary benefits such as recreation and scenic enjoyment. Groundwater is the common resource which is the basis for the overall health of the residents of Little Compton. A summary of the local resources, existing forms of protection and regulation, and threats to water quality follows.

<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island Basic Economic Statistics, Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, 1987, p. 34.

### 5.3.a Groundwater

All residents of the Town of Little Compton rely on groundwater for drinking water and other domestic purposes. Every home has a private well which taps into the glacial till soils or underlying bedrock to produce the quantity of water necessary to support daily household use. Groundwater is essentially held in common ownership by the residents of Little Compton, and is the Town's most important resource in terms of the health, safety and welfare of all residents.

**Definitions** - *Groundwater* is water found underground which completely fills the open spaces between particles of sand, gravel, clay, silt and consolidated rock fractures.<sup>3</sup>

Groundwater results from precipitation seeping into the ground and being temporarily stored there. A *groundwater aquifer* is a geologic formation capable of yielding a significant amount of water.<sup>4</sup> There are two types of aquifers, bedrock aquifers and aquifers in surficial glacial deposits.

Bedrock aquifers are solid rock formations that transmit water through cracks and fractures. Surficial glacial deposits are sediment over bedrock which was deposited by glaciers thousands of years ago. Two types of glacial sediment exist in Little Compton, till and stratified drift. *Till* typically consists of unsorted boulders, gravel, sand, silt and clay, and exhibits a low permeability. It functions primarily as a storage area that supplies water by natural gravity drainage to underlying bedrock. The average thickness of till is 20 feet. Wells dug in till have low and often variable yields.

*Stratified drift* is unconsolidated, sorted sediment composed of layers of sand, gravel, silt or clay, deposited by meltwater from glaciers. Coarse-grained stratified drift contains space between the gravel and sand particles which can hold large amounts of water without restricting its flow. A thick deposit of stratified drift has an excellent chance of yielding large quantities of water. An area of stratified drift with a saturated thickness of 40 feet or greater, and an average transmissivity of 4,000 square feet per day or greater is called a *groundwater reservoir*.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Rhode Island Groundwater Protection Act of 1985, Chapter 13.1 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

4 Rhode Island Groundwater Protection Act of 1985, Chapter 13.1 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

5 The State of the State's Groundwater, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Environmental Management, April, 1990.

The area beneath the land surface can be divided into two zones. In the upper zone, known as the unsaturated zone, open fractures in rocks or open spaces between soil particles are only partially filled with water. Beneath this zone all the open spaces are filled with water. The space where the water is held within these materials is called the zone of saturation.<sup>6</sup> Water within this zone is called *groundwater*, and its upper boundary is known as the *water table*.

**Little Compton's Groundwater** - The Town of Little Compton is almost entirely underlain by till aquifer, a type of glacial sediment which yields the lowest amount of groundwater of the soil types found in the State. There are a few small areas of stratified drift in the Town, which is a higher yielding soil type, as described above. These areas have not been mapped. There are *no groundwater reservoirs* located in Little Compton.

The saturated thickness of till in Little Compton averages between 5 and 10 feet. In winter and spring, when water tables are high, water levels in till commonly are within 5 to 10 feet of land surface, even in hilly areas. Till may become unsaturated during dry periods of summer and fall, and is generally an unreliable source of water in many areas. In Little Compton, some older homes may have shallow wells in till, but new homes generally have wells drilled into the underlying bedrock.<sup>7</sup> There are a number of combined wells located along the Adamsville Brook in the northeast part of Town. Well yields of 50 gallons per minute were reported in this area. This indicates the likely presence of stratified drift in this area.

The Town currently has no municipal wells. Residents use private wells for all domestic water needs. There is concern about the adequacy of water yields in wells in certain areas of Little Compton. Recent well completion reports submitted to the Groundwater Division of RIDEM indicate 3.5 to 4 gpm yields. Water yields in rock range from 1/2 gpm to 75 gpm, and eight out of ten wells yield less than 10 gpm.

**Groundwater Quality** - Groundwater in Little Compton is rated class GA, defined as "sources which may be suitable for public or private drinking water without treatment."<sup>8</sup>

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6 Rhode Island Groundwater Protection Act of 1985, Chapter 13.L of the Rhode Island General Laws.

7 Rhode Island Ground-Water Resources, National Water Summary - Rhode Island, U.S. Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 2275, page 376.

8 Class GAA consists of the State's major stratified drift aquifers and the critical portion of their recharge area as delineated by RIDEM, a 2,000 foot radius around community public supply wells, groundwater dependent areas, where in the event of contamination, alternative water supplies are not, as determined by the director, economically or technologically feasible to utilize.

Groundwater quality is generally good, attributable to the generally low density of development and the lack of major industrial and commercial development. The primary threats to groundwater quality in Little Compton are individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS), leaking underground storage tanks not identified by or registered with RIDEM, and non-point sources such as fertilizers and pesticides used in agriculture or for home lawns.

High soil fertility and healthy wetlands are the purification and filtering systems for the maintenance of groundwater quality. "The upper foot of native soil is the major zone of treatment for potential groundwater contaminants."<sup>9</sup> Fertile soil, rich in organic matter with high biological activity, has the capacity to remove heavy metals and many organic chemicals (but not all) before they reach the underlying groundwater. When pollutants "are placed into the environment below the surface soil, the potential for transport to the groundwater is markedly increased."<sup>10</sup> However, topsoil does have a finite capacity to remove pollutants. If it has poor fertility or if its fertility has been killed by contaminants, its lack of purification capacity becomes a threat to groundwater quality.

**Potential Sources of Groundwater Contamination** - Groundwater quality may be affected by "point" sources of pollution (coming from a specific source) and "nonpoint" (coming from disperse activities). Point pollution sources identified by RIDEM in the Groundwater Section Facility Inventory include landfills, dumps, underground injection control sites, surface impoundments, septic systems, salt storage sites, leaking underground storage tanks, and other miscellaneous sites. The inventory is not all-encompassing - additional potential contamination sources are likely to exist. Sites identified in Little Compton include the following:

- Little Compton Landfill and Transfer Station;
- Possible contamination of corner of Willow Avenue and Simmons Road, (former service station), and
- State Public Works Facility - potential leaking underground storage tanks registered with RIDEM, salt storage site..

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<sup>9</sup> North Kingstown Environmental Review Team Report, "Water for the future" Match, 1988. R.I. Resource Conservation and Development Area. Page 55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., page 54.

Other underground storage tank facilities registered with RIDEM are mapped in the facilities inventory. The Town is requiring that smaller tanks also be registered, and these will be added to this inventory when the registration process is completed.

Nonpoint sources of pollution include pesticides, fertilizers, septic systems, road salt application, radon and others.<sup>11</sup> In areas where groundwater is presumed suitable for drinking water use, the Town should pursue measures to reduce and/or mitigate such pollution. Nonpoint sources such as active farms using pesticides and fertilizers, residential lawns, roadway runoff, and runoff from other paved surfaces threaten groundwater quality.<sup>12</sup>

Nitrates are a specific concern, as they may be introduced to the groundwater through individual septic systems as well as through fertilizers applied to residential lawns and active agricultural lands. The EPA drinking water standard for nitrate-nitrogen is 10 milligrams per litre (mg/L), and is intended to prevent methemoglobinemia (blue baby syndrome).<sup>13</sup> Determination of the amount of nitrates which may potentially be introduced to the groundwater from a particular activity may be modeled in nitrogen loading studies, which a number of Rhode Island communities have recently instituted. In a report prepared for the Town of North Kingstown, entitled "Water for the Future", it was noted that a three bedroom home generates approximately 31 pounds of nitrate-nitrogen per year. To dilute this mass of nitrate to the drinking water standard of 10 mg/L requires approximately 366,000 gallons of water recharging the groundwater. To reach an average concentration of 10 mg/L would require a lot of more than one acre, as 1.0 acre of pervious lawn plus the paved or built areas on the lot (based on a 3 bedroom home) would be necessary to provide adequate dilution.<sup>14</sup> Maintaining the current zoning requirement of at least 2 acres for a building lot in Little Compton will help to ensure that nitrates are adequately filtered.

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<sup>11</sup> United States General Accounting Office Report to Chairman, Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, "Water Pollution, More Emphasis Needed on Prevention In EPA's Efforts to Protect Groundwater," December, 1991, pages 10-18.

<sup>12</sup> The State of the State's Groundwater, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Environmental Management, April, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> The Land Management Project, Land Use and Water Quality Series, Septic Systems, Fact Sheet No. 1, August, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> On Long Island, a concentration of 6.2 mg/L nitrate was used to ensure that drinking water will not exceed the 10 mg/L standard. To reach this concentration, the lot would need 1.46 acres of lawn in addition to paved and built areas. An 80,000 square foot lot would have to maintain less than 20 percent impervious surfaces to meet the standard. Water for the Future, Environmental Review Team Report, Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area, March, 1988.

**State Groundwater Protection Measures** - The State administers the Underground Storage Tank and Leaking Underground Storage Tank program, Oil Spill Emergency Response and Oil Storage programs, groundwater investigations, groundwater classification, the Wellhead Protection program and private well drilling regulations. State underground storage tank regulations require that tank owners and operators obtain certificates of registration from RIDEM and follow defined procedures for proper closure of tanks no longer in service. More stringent requirements apply to existing facilities located in sole source aquifers as designated by EPA or for new facilities located in an area where a leak could affect groundwater or surface water used for present or future public water supplies.<sup>15</sup>

The State requires a minimum of 100 feet between an individual well and an ISDS. The ISDS Task Force report published in 1987 indicates that 150 feet may be a more appropriate setback in areas of excessively permeable soils or fractured bedrock.<sup>16</sup> In addition, 150 feet is recommended as the setback for an ISDS from any coastal pond.

**Local Groundwater Protection Strategies** - Effective protection of groundwater resources may be achieved through local measures, including detailed hydrological studies, zoning and other land development regulations, and regulation of potentially hazardous activities. Existing zoning strategies for maintaining groundwater quality include the residential zoning "R" district, which requires a minimum lot area of two acres, and Section 14- 3.6 which indicates that no facility designed to leach fluid wastes into the soil shall be located closer than one hundred (100) feet to a water body, stream river or shoreline, including a fresh water or tidal wetland. The Town's subdivision regulations authorize the Plan Commission to require the provision of lots in excess of the minimum requirement if RIDEM, CRMC or other agency with jurisdiction indicates that larger lot sizes are required for the provision of adequate sewage disposal, adequate water aquifer or recharge zone or the protection of a valuable natural resource.

**Hydrogeological Studies** - To properly plan groundwater protection measures, the Town must have an understanding of its hydrogeological conditions. During the winter of 1991-92, research into these conditions in Little Compton was initiated. A preliminary

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<sup>15</sup> The State of the State's Groundwater, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Environmental Management, April, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Water for the Future, Environmental Review Team Report, Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area, March, 1988.



analysis of the effects of groundwater contamination was conducted by Szepatowski Associates, Inc.<sup>17</sup>

This study of nitrogen loading in the Town's groundwater uses "a widely known simulation model...known as BURBS" developed by Cornell University. The study provides a preliminary foundation for the community's future efforts to prevent contamination of its water supply. It recommends that further work on this process, including establishment of a well-testing and monitoring program, be undertaken. The study is included in Appendix 5-A.

Neighboring towns have already begun to experience the contamination of significant numbers of private wells;<sup>18</sup> the cost for them to solve these problems could be enormous.<sup>19</sup> While Little Compton has been given an "acceptable" rating by RIDEM regarding its potable water quality, there is concern that nitrogen levels may be increasing in some wells around the Town.

The next step should be to undertake more extensive research into the basic geological and hydrological conditions that affect Little Compton's groundwater. The Town should expand upon the Szepatowski study to provide additional background information for future planning efforts. This effort is also important for maintenance of Townwide health and safety standards.

A hydrogeologic study identifies the geologic and groundwater conditions of an area, and may include the following items:<sup>20</sup>

- Groundwater watersheds, groundwater flow direction and groundwater topography;
- Surface water watersheds, flow direction and topography;

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<sup>17</sup> Szepatowski Associates, Inc. is an environmental engineering and planning firm located in Jamestown, Rhode Island. The firm conducted a preliminary study free of charge. Mr. David Emilita, Little Compton resident and an employee of Szepatowski, directed the study.

<sup>18</sup> Private Well Contamination in Massachusetts: Sources, Responses and Needs, April 1988, prepared for the special legislative commission on water supply - Commonwealth of Massachusetts. By June M. Weintraub, Senior Environmental Analyst

<sup>19</sup> "Contamination found in 13 wells near Turners Road", (Middletown) article in Providence Journal-Bulletin, December 18, 1991; "Residents concerned about wells", (Middletown) article in Providence Journal-Bulletin, December 19, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Water for the Future, Environmental Review Team Report, Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area, March, 1988.

- Geologic characteristics from bedrock to ground surface;
- Land use in surface and groundwater watersheds;
- List of known contaminant sources in the surface water and groundwater watersheds; and,
- Water quality sampling results which may include total coliform bacteria, fecal coliform bacteria, sulfate, nitrate, nitrites, turbidity, color, sodium, chlorides, iron, hardness, pH, total solids, sediment, manganese, specific pesticides or any other item of concern.

A base hydrogeologic study may be prepared for the Town as a whole, and the Town may also require such studies for developments. The Town should focus its efforts on groundwater protection through the following avenues:<sup>21</sup>

1. Inventory of present and future groundwater resources, land use and water supply demand - hydrogeologic study.
2. Establish land use regulatory programs through planning and zoning. Prohibit high-risk uses. Consider how such uses can be accommodated without threatening groundwater resources.
3. Maintain and increase townwide soil fertility and wetland health for groundwater purification.
4. Ordinances directed at the storage, use and disposal of hazardous materials; and, the underground storage and transmission of fuel to residences.
5. Groundwater monitoring - establish a testing program to determine whether water quality is acceptable.
6. Education - informing the public about the proper disposal and handling of potential pollutants and the roles that soil fertility and wetland health play in groundwater cleansing.
7. Municipal activities - proper salt storage and road salting/sanding procedures.

**Summary** - Recognizing that the Town of Little Compton depends solely upon groundwater for its drinking water supply, and that alternatives to this supply are few and prohibitively expensive, it is critical that a comprehensive program of groundwater protection measures be instituted.

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<sup>21</sup> Protecting Connecticut's Groundwater, A Guide to Groundwater Protection for Local Officials, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, September, 1984.

### 5.3.b Rhode Island Sound

Little Compton is bounded by the Rhode Island Sound to the south. The coastline has been an attraction for residential development, as many people desire to live along the coast for its scenic beauty. It is dotted with residential development, both estates on large lots and smaller, high density cottage type development. Interspersed with the development are coastal ponds, beaches, and rocky shores.

There are a number of public access points to the ocean, including Lloyd's Beach, the Town Landing, the Town Beach, and Goosewing Beach. CRMC has classified Briggs Beach, Round Pond Beach, Ship Pond Cove, and Quicksand Pond Beach as undeveloped bather beaches. Moderately developed barrier beaches include Tunipus Pond Beach, and Watch House Pond Beach. These designations limit the extent and type of new development permissible on these beaches. Undeveloped barrier beaches are intended to remain as conservation areas, with no future development permitted. New development is prohibited on moderately developed bathers, with specific exceptions detailed in the CRMP handbook.<sup>22</sup>

Other coastal features in Little Compton are also regulated by the CRMC, including coastal beaches and dunes, barrier beaches, coastal wetlands, coastal cliffs, bluffs and banks, rocky shores, and manmade shores. Waters within 500 feet of the mean high water mark of Little Compton's coastline are classified as Type 1 by CRMC.<sup>23</sup> These are 1) water areas that are within the boundaries of designated wildlife refuges and conservation areas, 2) water areas that have retained undisturbed natural habitat or maintain scenic values of unique or unusual significance, and 3) water areas that are particularly unsuitable for structures due to their exposure to severe wave action, flooding and erosion?" Waters beyond this 500 foot mark east of the southern tip of West Island near Sakonnet point are Type 4 waters. These are multipurpose waters which support a variety of commercial and recreational activities while maintaining good value as fish and wildlife habitat, and water adjacent to shorelines that could support water-dependent commercial, industrial and/or high-intensity recreational activities. Each type of water has an associated list of activities which either require an assent from the Council or are prohibited, such as filling, removal and grading of shoreline features, residential structures, marinas, municipal sewage treat-

<sup>22</sup>The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program, As Amended, Coastal Resources Management Council, The Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, New Edition, 1990.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, page 38.

ment facilities and individual sewage disposal systems. The waters along the Little Compton's southern coast line are class SA waters, the highest water quality class, considered suitable for bathing and contact recreation, shellfish harvesting for direct human consumption, fish and wildlife habitat. It is important that the quality of these waters be maintained to protect the Little Compton shoreline for continued commercial fishing, tourism and recreational uses.

### **5.3.c Sakonnet Harbor**

Sakonnet Harbor, on the southwestern tip of Little Compton, is one of the Town's most valuable natural - and cultural - resources. Located on the east side of the entrance to the Sakonnet River, it is a fairly shallow, rockbound cove that is open to the river on the north, protected on the south and east by land, and on the west by an 800-foot riprap breakwater.

The harbor has a water surface of some 25 acres, 12 acres of which are dredged to a depth of eight feet. (RIDEM has given the harbor an SA Water Quality condition and Classification). The southern shore of the harbor consists of a Federally protected bather beach and, behind it, a natural tidal wetland owned by the state and management by RIDEM as a wildlife refuge. The western side is composed largely of commercial fishing and pleasure boating docking facilities; the eastern side consists of the Sakonnet Yacht Club and numerous private residences.

CRMC has divided the use of the harbor into two classifications. Waters adjacent to the bather beach area are considered Type 2, low intensity use. This includes "waters in areas with high scenic value that support low-intensity recreational and residential uses. These waters include seasonal mooring areas where good water quality and fish and wildlife habitat are maintained."<sup>25</sup> The remainder of the harbor is designated Type 5, commercial and recreational waters. CRMC policy for Type 5 waters is to maintain the diversity of water-related activities (such as recreational boating, commercial fishing) while maintaining and/or enhancing the character of the area and promoting the most efficient use of space.<sup>26</sup>

Sakonnet Harbor is the site for a variety of water-related activities: recreational boating, commercial fishing, swimming scuba diving and sailboarding. While commercial fishing

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, page 40.

<sup>26</sup> Sakonnet Harbor Master Plan, Little Compton, Rhode Island, Henderson Planning Group, 1987, page 2.4.

is the primary winter activity, it continues at a high level throughout the year. In warm weather, recreational boating also reaches its peak.

Further issues and policies regarding the harbor, and the ongoing needs of both the commercial fishing and the recreational boating interests, are identified in a newly-revised Sakonnet Harbor Management Plan.

#### **5.3.d Rivers, Ponds and Streams**

The Sakonnet River forms the western boundary of the Town, running from the Taunton River through Mount Hope Bay into Rhode Island Sound. The River's waters are considered RIDEM Class SA, as described previously. Waters within 500 feet of the mean high water mark of the Sakonnet River shoreline are classified as CRMC Type 1, and waters beyond this 500 foot line are Type 2 waters.

There are three (3) major freshwater stream systems flowing from north to south. The easternmost is Adamsville Brook, rated as Class-B waters along its entirety.<sup>27</sup> Wetlands associated with this system in Little Compton are forested wetlands. It meanders along the east side of Crandall Road before flowing into Mill Pond in Westport. From there it passes under Adamsville Road and into the West Branch of the Westport River. Adamsville Brook is stocked with trout and used extensively by fishing enthusiasts in the spring. The Sakonnet Preservation Association owns some of the land between Adamsville Brook and Crandall Road, assuring access for fishing enthusiasts.

The second major freshwater system includes Colebrook and its associated forested wetlands, shrub swamps and wet meadows. It originates in Tiverton just north of the Town line. It flows into Simmons Pond (an old mill pond) and then through a series of manmade ponds before becoming West Brook and reaching Quicksand Pond. The part of the brook that has been classified, from Simmons Pond to Quicksand Pond, is considered Class-A water. Simmons Pond supports largemouth bass, chain pickerel, sunfish and an occasional osprey. Wood ducks nest there and other species of ducks including black ducks, mallards and buffleheads have been observed. There is very little residential devel-

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<sup>27</sup> For inland surface waters, RIDEM considers Class A suitable for existing or proposed drinking water supply, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational use, agricultural use, industrial supply and other purposes. Class B is considered suitable for bathing, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational use, agricultural use, industrial supply and other legitimate uses, including navigation. Class C is considered suitable for recreational use, fish and wildlife agricultural and industrial water supply, industrial cooling, sewerage discharges and other legitimate uses, including navigation.

opment along Colebrook, increasing its value as wildlife habitat. The Sakonnet Preservation Association has acquired various lots bordering the brook in an attempt to protect this freshwater system. The Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust has acquired development rights to a parcel swaddling the brook. After meandering through several miles of undisturbed woods, Colebrook enters Quicksand Pond.

The third freshwater system is Dunderry Brook. This brook and associated forested wetlands, shrub swamps and wet meadows originates south of Peckham Road and flows southward into a small pond on the north side of Meeting House Lane at "The Ponderosa." From there, Dunderry Brook flows under Meeting House Lane and meanders a little more than a mile through undeveloped woodlands before flowing into Town-owned Wilbour Woods on the north side of Swamp Road. Dirt roads and trails through Wilbour Woods provide access to the brook where the Town maintains a few picnic sites.

The section of Dunderry Brook north of Meeting House Lane is rated as Class-B water. Below Meeting House Lane until the Brook reaches Wilbour Woods, the Brook is considered Class-C water, from Wilbour Woods South to Briggs Marsh the water is upgraded to Class-B. The brook supports trout, so fishing enthusiasts as well as picnickers, hikers, and runners use the area. Local garden clubs conduct walks along the brook to see the streamside flowers that bloom there. In addition, teachers from the Wilbour School occasionally bring their classes to Wilbour Woods to conduct field trips along the brook. From Wilbour Woods, the brook flows under Swamp Road before entering Briggs Marsh. Dunderry Brook is a valuable natural feature and is used in a variety of ways by many people. The Town of Little Compton protects part of it and makes it accessible through its ownership and maintenance of Wilbour Woods. The Sakonnet Preservation Association has acquired some lots bordering the brook and continues to pursue strategies for protecting more of Dunderry Brook.

A number of other intermittent streams are found throughout the Town, in addition to numerous small natural and manmade ponds (Simmons Mill Pond, Grays Mill Pond). These water bodies serve as part of the Town's natural drainage system, channeling overland runoff into wetlands, ponds, the Sakonnet River, and Rhode Island Sound.

The Harold E. Watson Reservoir is a 375 acre reservoir owned by the City of Newport as part of its public drinking water supply. It is classified as Class A, suitable for drinking water supply. Streams feeding the reservoir include Pachet Brook and a number of small,

unnamed streams. The City owns 300 watershed acres surrounding the reservoir. The watershed stretches from the Tiverton boundary south to a point north of Simmons Road, west to the Sakonnet River shore and east to the high ground beyond Long Highway. To the northwest of the reservoir are two hills, Windmill Hill and Richmond Hill, rising approximately 130 to 140 feet above sea level. Most of the steep land in these areas is owned by the City of Newport, and will remain undeveloped.

Protection of the quality of this reservoir as a drinking water supply for the City of Newport is critical, and the City has taken and continues to take measures to maintain the water quality in its water resource management plans. Activities which occur around the reservoir may affect the quality of the water, for example, salting of Peckham Road or Willow Avenue within the watershed. As the host community for this resource, Little Compton has the responsibility to ensure that such activities do not degrade the reservoir's quality. Maintaining vegetated buffers around the tributary streams which feed the reservoir will help maintain the water quality. The Scituate Reservoir Watershed Management Plan provides good direction for establishment of such buffers.<sup>28</sup> The Town has perpetual rights to acquire or purchase water from the Reservoir through its agreement with the City of Newport (Rhode Island General Laws, Chapter 78, Section B, page 276, 1957-58).

A number of large coastal ponds, Quicksand Pond, Tunipus Pond, Briggs Marsh, Round Pond and Long Pond area located along the southern shore.

### **5.3.e Coastal Wetlands and Ponds**

Coastal wetlands include salt marshes and freshwater or brackish wetlands contiguous to salt marshes. Areas of open water within coastal wetlands are considered a part of the wetland. In Little Compton, the entire shoreline has been defined by RIDEM as marine/estuarine unconsolidated shore. Coastal ponds identified as estuarine open water include Quicksand Pond, Briggs Marsh, Round Pond, Little Pond, Watch House Pond, Tunipus Pond and Long Pond. Many of the ponds are surrounded by estuarine emergent wetlands, typically salt marshes.

By their nature, coastal ponds and salt marshes are more susceptible to pollutants from nitrates than are fresh water wetlands. Government standards of 10 milligrams per liter for fresh water cannot be applied uniformly to saline solutions. For the protection of aquatic

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<sup>28</sup> Scituate Reservoir Watershed Management Plan, Report No. 70, State Guide Plan Element 125, Division of Planning, Rhode Island Department of Administration, December, 1990.

life and to prevent eutrophication, anywhere between .4 and .6 milligrams per liter should be not be exceeded.<sup>29</sup>

All the coastal ponds are designated as Type 1 Waters, Conservation Areas, by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC).<sup>30</sup> Type 1 waters are 1) water areas that are within the boundaries of designated wildlife refuges and conservation areas, 2) water areas that have retained undisturbed natural habitat or maintain scenic values of unique or unusual significance, and 3) water areas that are particularly unsuitable for structures due to their exposure to severe wave action, flooding and erosion.<sup>31</sup> By designating these areas Type 1, CRMC indicates the intention to preserve and protect the ponds from "activities and uses that have the potential to degrade scenic, wildlife, and plant habitat values, or which may adversely impact water quality and the diversity of natural shoreline types."<sup>32</sup>

The salinity of the water in coastal ponds changes throughout the season when breachways break through the barrier beaches separating them from the sea. The mixture of seawater and freshwater creates a brackish water community that is different from both fresh and saltwater communities. Such ecosystems are very productive and have been used as food sources throughout the Town's history.

Coastal ponds support a variety of species of fish. Alewives and perch migrate from the sea into coastal ponds each spring to lay eggs in the streams that flow into them. Eels and

<sup>29</sup>For more detailed discussion see Dr. Daniel Urish, "R.I. Site Suitability Assessment Manual for Large Flow and Multiple Flow On-site Sewage Disposal Systems," January, 1991.

<sup>30</sup>The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program. As Amended, Coastal Resources Management Council, The Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, New Edition, 1990.

<sup>31</sup>The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program, As Amended, Coastal Resources Management Council, The Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, page 38, New Edition, 1990.

<sup>32</sup>The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program, As Amended, Coastal Resources Management Council, The Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, New Edition, 1990. Type 2, Low Intensity Use Waters, includes waters in areas with high scenic value that support low-intensity recreational and residential uses. These waters include seasonal mooring areas where good water quality and fish and wildlife habitat are maintained. Type 3, High-Intensity Boating Waters, include intensely utilized water areas where recreational boating activities dominate and where the adjacent shorelines are developed as marinas, boatyards, and associated water-enhanced and water-dependent businesses. Type 4, Multipurpose Waters support a variety of commercial and recreational activities while maintaining good value as fish and wildlife habitat, and water adjacent to shorelines that could support water-dependent commercial, industrial and/or high-intensity recreational activities. Type 5, Commercial and Recreational Harbors, are adjacent to waterfront areas that support a variety of tourist, recreational and commercial activities. Type 6 waters are industrial waterfronts and commercial navigation channels.



white perch live in some of the ponds and those with lower salinity can even support bass. Migrating ducks including canvasback, bufflehead, grebes, coot, goldeneye, black ducks, and mergansers are seen on the ponds. In addition, Canada Geese use these ponds extensively during annual migration and for nesting. Quicksand Pond is also an extremely valuable seasonal feeding area for osprey.

Quicksand Pond is the least disturbed coastal pond in Rhode Island and has been identified by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) as an important open space, deserving priority consideration for protection. The Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, the Sakonnet Preservation Association, the Nature Conservancy and the Town of Little Compton are working together to try to preserve the land on the southwest side of the pond as well as the bather beach along its southern edge.

### **5.3.f Bather Beaches**

A barrier beach is defined as "narrow strips of land made of unconsolidated material, usually extending parallel to the coast and separated from the mainland by a coastal pond, tidal water body, or coastal wetland. Undeveloped bather beaches are essentially free of commercial/industrial buildings (excluding public utility lines), houses, surfaced roads and structure shoreline protection facilities. Moderately development bather beaches are those that are free of houses, commercial/industrial buildings and/or facilities (excluding public utility lines) that contain surfaced roads, recreational structures, and/or structural shoreline protection facilities. Developed barrier beaches contain houses and/or commercial/industrial structures; they may also contain surfaced roads and structural shoreline protection facilities."<sup>33</sup>

CRMC has classified Long Pond Beach, Round Meadow Pond, High Hill Marsh Bather (eastern portion), Briggs Beach, Round Pond Beach, Ship Pond Cove, and Quicksand Pond Beach as undeveloped barrier beaches. Moderately developed barrier beaches include Sakonnet Harbor Beach (eastern portion), Tunipus Pond Beach, and Watch House Pond Beach. No developed barrier beaches are located in Little Compton. These designations limit the extent and type of new development permissible on these beaches. Undeveloped barrier beaches are intended to remain *as* conservation areas, with no future development

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<sup>33</sup> The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program, As Amended, Coastal Resources Management Council, The Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, New Edition, 1990.

permitted. New development is prohibited on moderately developed barriers, with specific exceptions detailed in the CRMP handbook.<sup>34</sup>

### **5.3.g Freshwater Wetlands**

The dominant type of inland wetland in Little Compton is the forested wetland, commonly known as the wooded swamp (see Figure 5-1). Most of the wooded swamps are vegetated with broad-leaved deciduous trees, including red maples, gum, oak and others. Small wooded swamps dominated by coniferous vegetation are also found in Little Compton.

The scrub/shrub wetland, also known as a shrub swamp, is the second most common inland wetland type found in Little Compton. Though not as common as the wooded swamp, the scrub/shrub swamp is found in most areas of the Town, with the largest swamp located west of West Main Road south of the Meetinghouse Road intersection. These swamps are characterized by a dominance of shrubs or tree saplings less than 20 feet tall, broad-leaved shrubs and other low growing plants including bottombush, sweetgale, highbush blueberry, swamp azalea, winterberries and others. They may also be intermixed with emergent wetlands which are vegetated by nonpersistent grasses, rushes, sedges, and other herbaceous or grass-like plants.<sup>35</sup>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service defines wetlands as "lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water. For purposes of this classification wetlands must have one or more of the following three attributes: 1) at least periodically, the land supports predominantly hydrophytes; 2) the substrate is predominantly undrained hydric soil; and 3) the substrate is nonsoil and is saturated with water or covered by shallow water at some time during the growing season of each year."<sup>36</sup> The formation of "hydric" (water-saturated) soils, and certain plants and animals which have adapted to living in a "wet" environment, indicate the presence of a land in which the water table is at, near or above the ground surface, i.e., wetland. Many wetlands occur between uplands and open water bodies, others are found in upland areas where there is a seasonally high water table.

Wetlands provide several important functions, as follows:<sup>37</sup>

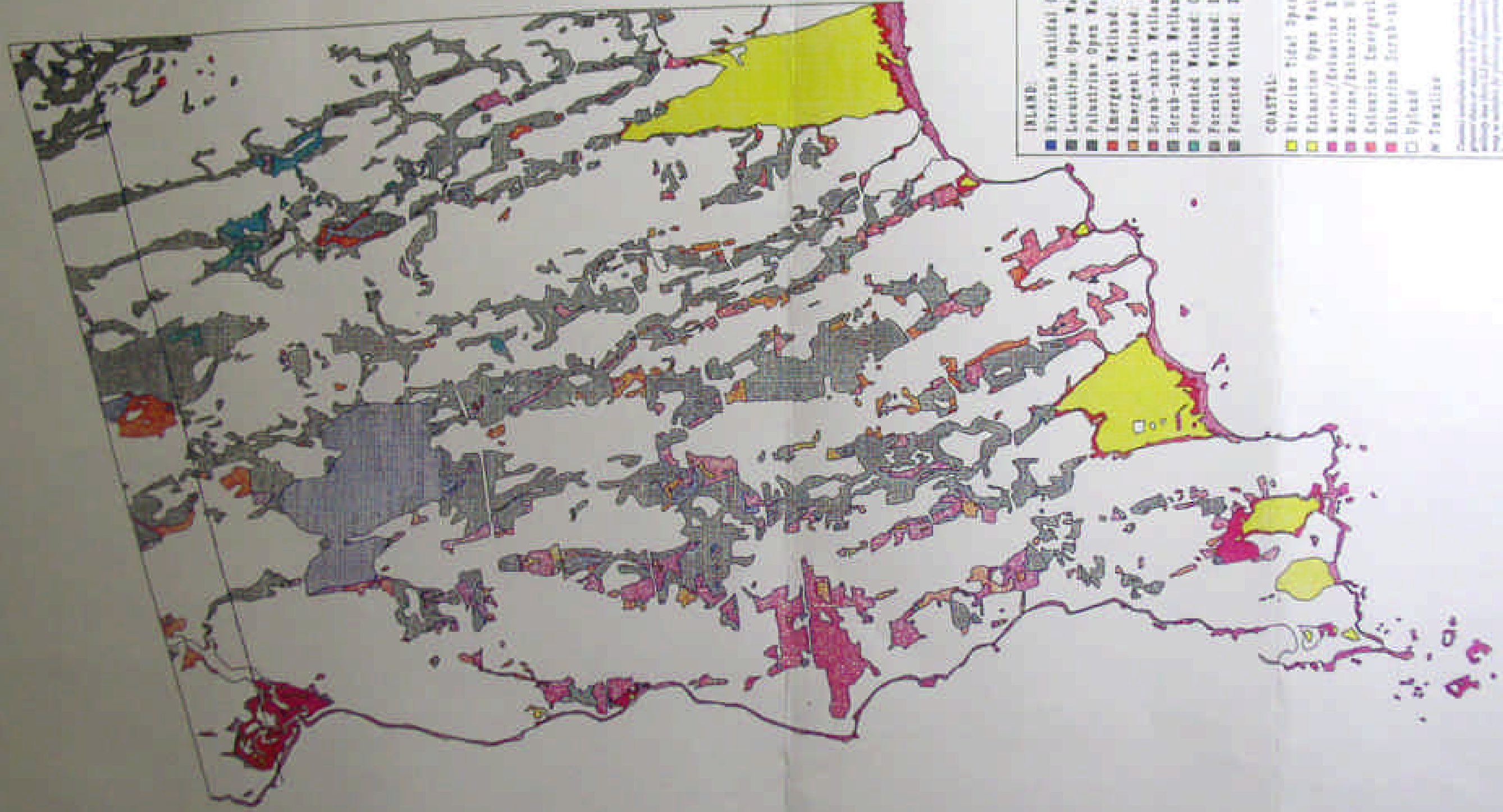
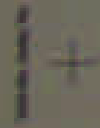
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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Wetlands of Rhode Island, U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wetlands Inventory, September, 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Page 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Page 52.



- INLAND:**
- Emergent Wetland: Open Water
  - Lacustrine Open Water
  - Palustrine Open Water
  - Emergent Wetland: Marsh/Wet Meadow
  - Emergent Wetland: Emergent Fen or Bog
  - Scrub-shrub Wetland: Shrub Swamp
  - Scrub-shrub Wetland: Shrub Fen or Bog
  - Forested Wetland: Coniferous
  - Forested Wetland: Deciduous
  - Forested Wetland: Broad
- COASTAL:**
- Emergent Tidal Open Water
  - Lacustrine Open Water
  - Marine/Estuarine Rocky Shore
  - Marine/Estuarine Unconsolidated Shore
  - Estuarine Emergent Wetland
  - Estuarine Scrub-shrub Wetland
  - Open
  - Townline

Colors outside white lines are the same as the colors within a white line or within a 1/2 mile buffer. Town lines are shown in black. The white line around the map is a buffer of 1/2 mile. The map is a work of planning and is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

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# WETLANDS

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island



Little Compton, Rhode Island

Figure 5-1

- *Environmental Quality* - Water quality maintenance: pollution filter, sediment removal, oxygen production, nutrient recycling, chemical and nutrient absorption, aquatic productivity;
- *Socio-economic Values* - flood control, wave damage protection, shoreline erosion control, groundwater recharge, water supply timber and other natural products, energy source (peat), livestock grazing, fish and shellfishing, hunting and trapping, recreation, aesthetics, education and scientific research.
- *Ecological values* - fish and shellfish habitat, waterfowl and other bird habitat, mammal and other wildlife habitat.

Wetlands are particularly important as natural water filters, working to improve water quality by transforming, removing, storing and releasing organic and chemical elements in stormwater.<sup>38</sup> Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, are removed from water largely during the growing season, and exported during the winter, when plants die back and are decaying.<sup>39</sup> Wetlands also serve to remove sediments from stormwater runoff, allowing water to remain in the wetland for a few days promoting the settling of particles and attached pollutants.<sup>40</sup> The process of adsorption may then occur, where dissolved particles adhere to suspended solids, bottom sediments or vegetation and are removed from the water column.<sup>41</sup> The efficiency of a wetland to remove pollutants from runoff depends on the climate, precipitation, vegetation, soil type and watershed and stormwater characteristics.<sup>42</sup>

Wetlands are also critical as wildlife and waterfowl habitat. Areas surrounding wetlands are important for providing the seclusion waterfowl need to rest and carry out their activities without predation and disturbance. Geese, mute Sans and black ducks all regularly nest in the coastal wetland areas of Little Compton.<sup>43</sup> Shorebirds, herons and egrets feed in Little Compton marshes. Many mammals and other wildlife inhabit wetlands, including muskrats, river otter, mink, beaver, raccoon, skunk, red fox, fisher, and weasel. Reptiles and amphibians, such as turtles, snakes, toads and frogs also make their homes in wetlands. The type of wetland and its diversity plays an important role in determining its

<sup>38</sup> The Land Management Project, Land Use and Water Quality Series, Artificial Wetlands, Best Management Practices Fact Sheet No. 3, September, 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Rhode Island's Coastal Natural Areas: Priorities for Protection and Management, George L.. Seavey, Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island, Marine Technical Report No. 43.

habitat value. Wetlands which now provide habitat to rare, threatened or endangered species should be given priority consideration for protection.

Buffering wetlands from areas of human activity will help to remove additional pollutants before they reach the wetland. Buffer widths have been recommended from 25 feet to 300', depending on the nature of the receiving water body, the significance of the habitat, soil types, slope conditions and other factors. Currently the Town provides for a buffer of 100 feet between structures and/or septic systems and wetlands. When the area to be disturbed is determined to be a significant wildlife habitat, a buffer of at least 300 feet is suggested." This is considered the minimum distance that will prevent disturbance of wildlife from development, noise, pollution and other human activities." Many states have established ranking systems to determine appropriate buffer widths, based on criteria such as soil conditions, slope, quantity and quality of vegetation, potential water quality impacts from the activity and proximity of the activity to valuable resource areas, eg. drinking water supplies, important wildlife habitat. An evaluation of buffer widths should be an undertaking for the future.

### **5.3.h Regulation of Wetlands**

Freshwater wetlands in Little Compton are regulated by the State Freshwater Wetlands Act, (R.I.G.L. 2-1-18, et. seq.) and coastal wetlands are regulated by the Coastal Resources Management Act (R.I.G.L. 46-23-1 et. seq.). The Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (Section 10) and the Clean Water Act of 1977 (Section 404, formerly Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972) are administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and regulate tidal wetlands below the mean high water mark, nontidal wetland below the ordinary high water mark and wetlands contiguous with all waters of the United States.

The Freshwater Wetlands Act requires that a permit be obtained from RIDEM Freshwater Wetlands Section before any freshwater wetland is altered in any way. Filling, grading, clearing of vegetation or construction is considered alteration of a wetland." The Act protects land that is clearly wet, such as ponds, rivers, marshes, streams and bogs, as well as those areas which may seem dry for much of the year, such as wooded swamps, where water is not observed on the surface, and areas subject to storm flow and flooding.

<sup>44</sup>The Land Management Project, Land Use and Water Quality Series, Vegetated Buffer Strips, Best Management Practices Fact Sheet No. 4, September, 1990.

<sup>45</sup>Buffer Zones: The Environment's Last Defense, A Report Submitted by: Massachusetts Audubon: North Shore to the City of Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1989.

<sup>46</sup>Freshwater Wetlands Act Information Sheet, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

Wetlands include swamps of 3 or more acres, marshes of 1 or more acres, bogs and ponds of 1/4 acres or greater. The law also considers as wetlands certain areas which might be dry all year round, such as the area 50 feet around ponds, marshes, swamps and bogs, along with the area 100 feet from flowing bodies of water less than 10 feet in width and the area 200 feet from flowing bodies of water greater than 10 feet in width.

Coastal wetlands are regulated by CRMC, which requires a Council Assent for "all alterations and activities" that are proposed for "1) tidal waters within the territorial sea (including coastal ponds, some of which are not tidal but which are coastal waters associated with a barrier beach system); 2) shoreline features; and 3) areas contiguous to shoreline features. Contiguous areas include all lands and waters directly adjoining shoreline features that extend inland two hundred (200) feet from the inland border of that shoreline feature." Shoreline features are defined as 1) coastal beaches and dunes, 2) barrier beaches, 3) coastal wetlands, 4) coastal cliffs, bluffs and banks, 5) rocky shores, and 6) manmade shores.

**Local Wetland Protection** - The Town has exercised the option of placing more restrictive regulations upon wetlands within its boundaries. Section 14-3.6 of the Town of Little Compton Zoning Ordinance, Setback from Water Bodies, indicates that "no building, structure or sign may be located within one hundred (100) feet of any water body, stream, river or shoreline except for boat sheds, piers, bathhouses, cabanas and similar structures. No facility designed to leach fluid wastes into the soil shall be located closer than one hundred (100) feet to any such water body, stream river or shoreline, including a fresh water or tidal wetland. Buffering wetlands from areas of human activity will help to remove additional pollutants before they reach the wetland. An evaluation of buffer widths may be an undertaking for the future.

### **5.3.i Flood Hazards**

The entire coastline of Little Compton is vulnerable to flooding and severe wave action during powerful storms. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has designated all shoreline areas in the Town as "V zones", which are areas subject to 100-year coastal flooding with potentially damaging wave action.<sup>47</sup> Landward of the V zones are "A zones" which are also subject to flooding during 100-year storms, but are not exposed to

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<sup>47</sup> Flood Insurance Rate Map, Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island, Newport County, Community-Panel Number 440035 0002 D, Map revised February 15, 1985, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

wave action. Development in these areas is subject to damage or destruction during severe storms. Adjoining these areas in some locations are "B zones" which include land between the limits of the 100-year and 500-year flood zones, or certain areas subject to 100 year flooding with average depths less than one foot.

Ponds and streams with adjoining "A zone" flood hazard areas include Simmons Pond, segments of Colebrook, the area surrounding Watson Reservoir, segments of Pachet Brook, Almy Creek, segments of Dunderry Brook, Briggs Marsh, Quicksand Pond, Tunipus Pond, Long Pond and Round Pond (see Figure 5-2). Development in special flood hazard areas has the potential to reduce flood storage capacity by increasing the amount impervious surface in a flood zone.

Local controls governing development in flood hazard areas include Zoning Ordinance Section 14-2.5, Construction or Development in Special Flood Hazard Areas, the Building Code, and Section 13-5.6 of the Subdivision of Land Ordinance, Land Subject to Flooding. The Town requires that any development in a flood hazard area (zones A or V), receive a building permit, and prohibits certain types of development in these areas.

#### **5.4 Soils**

High soil fertility contribute to the purification and filtering systems for the maintenance of groundwater quality. Fertile soil, rich in organic matter with high biological activity, has the capacity to remove most but not all heavy metals and many organic chemicals before they reach the underlying groundwater. Topsoil does have a finite capacity to remove pollutants. If it has poor fertility or if its fertility has been killed by contaminants, its lack of purification capacity becomes a threat to groundwater quality. <sup>48</sup>

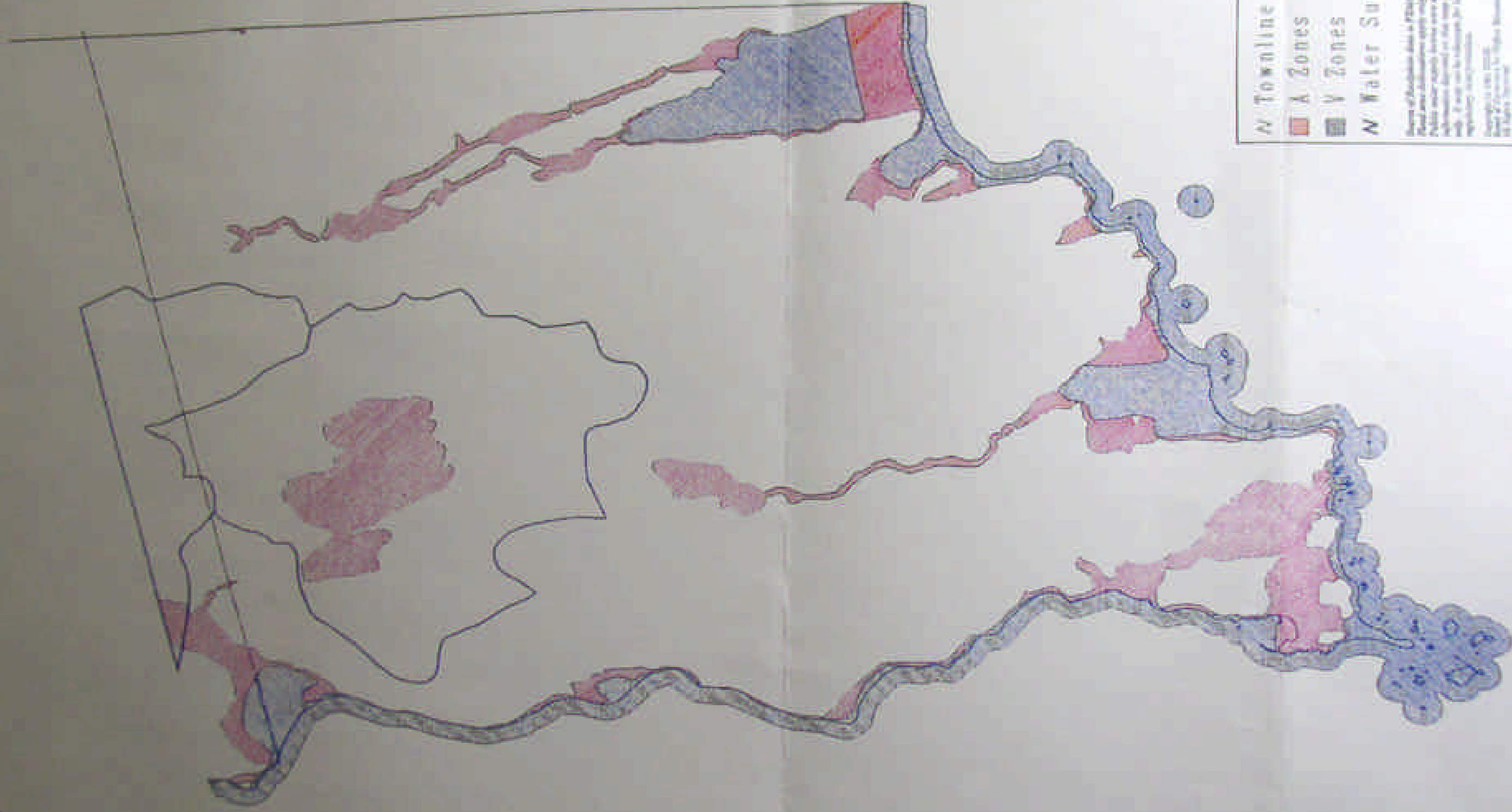
Certain soil characteristics lend themselves to use for crops and pastures, while others may serve well as locations for buildings or transportation routes. Soils with poor drainage and high flooding frequency may be unsuitable for development. Soils with a high water table, rapid permeability or shallow depth to bedrock may preclude installation of on-site septic systems unless special design features are incorporated to mitigate these problems. Decisions regarding individual development applications should be based upon site specific soils data. For the purposes of this Plan, soils are defined as follows (see Figure 5-3): <sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See also section on groundwater on page 5 of this report.

<sup>49</sup> Rhode Island Geographic Information System, 1991. Note that the map on Figure 5-3 has multiple layers which, in some areas overlap, and thereby may produce colors that do not appear in the legend.

10000'

10000'



- W Townline
- A Zones
- V Zones
- W Water Supply Basin

Source of boundary data is FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Flood zone delineations apply only to the extent of the delineation. Public water supply areas were delineated by ADEQ. The delineation depicted on this map is suitable for planning purposes only. It will not be suitable for legal boundary delineation or regulatory uses.

Prepared by: W&A  
 Date: 12/15/2011  
 W&A Engineers, Inc.

Figure 6-4

### HYDROGRAPHICALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island





Scale 1:50,000



Scale 1:50,000



Figure 5-3

# SOILS ANALYSIS

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island

### W Townline

- Moderate Constraints to Development
- Incessant High Water Table (10" - 12" depth)
- Bedrock and Steep Constraints (> 15% slope)
- Hydric Soils - Severe Constraints (0" - 10" depth)
- All Others - Severe Constraints (rock, sand, etc.)
- Prime Agricultural Soils
- Waterbodies (SEA delineated)

Soils were mapped by the Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and delineated at a scale of 1:25,000. The information presented here is an analysis of the soils and constraints associated with the various soil types. It is not intended to be used as a substitute for a site-specific soil analysis. The information presented here is for informational purposes only and should not be used for any other purpose. The information presented here is for informational purposes only and should not be used for any other purpose.

Map prepared by the Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island, in cooperation with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.



**Soils with Moderate Constraints to Development** - Soils which are generally suited to residential development. Some soils in this group have moderate soil constraints for development and evaluations must be made on a case by case basis. The constraints consist of: 1) very rapidly permeable soils which have a higher potential for groundwater contamination; 2) slowly permeable soils which tend to have greater septic system failure rates and 3) extremely stony soils, which are expensive to excavate and grade for residential development. Also included are disturbed areas which are often suitable for residential development, but which need site specific evaluation. Prime agricultural soils, defined as those best suited for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops, and also available for these uses, are also classified as having moderate constraints to development.

**Soils with High Constraints to Development** - Soils in this group have slopes in excess of 15 percent (greater than 15 percent slope - 15 feet of vertical rise over 100 feet of horizontal distance), and/or have significant shallow to bedrock areas, or seasonal high water tables. Steep slopes increase the potential for soil erosion during construction, and make construction of on-site septic systems difficult. Shallow soils, and rock outcrops impair the construction of roads, buildings, buried utilities and on-site septic systems.

Soils with a seasonal high water table (19 inches to 42 inches depth) are considered to have high constraints to development. They generally have a seasonal high water table at a depth of 1.5 to 3.5 feet from the surface for significant periods during the year. Many of these soils have additional constraints to development, such as slow permeability or, in a few instances, very rapid permeability.

**Soils with Severe Constraints to Development** - These are hydric (wet) soils (0 -18 inches depth) which have water at, or near, the surface for significant periods of the year. Other severe constraints (rock, sand etc.) which consist of miscellaneous soil types that have significant constraints for residential development. Soils underlying barrier beaches may also be considered as having severe constraints to development. Development on or near hydric soils poses many more concerns in terms of potential water resource and/or wetlands impacts, as well as many of the above-mentioned concerns. In most cases, development on soils in this group is not possible because of State wetlands regulations. Presence of hydric soils on a development site should trigger further investigation of wetlands, and the potential impacts that such development may have on the function of the wetland.

Agricultural Soils - Little Compton is underlain, to a large extent, by prime agricultural soils. Approximately one-half of the Town is comprised of this soil grouping, making these lands highly susceptible to development. These areas run in broad, north-south strips, separated by broad strips of hydric soils which follow stream and wetland systems. Nearly all the frontage along West Main Road, and a significant portion of frontage along Long Highway, South Commons Road, Willow Avenue, and East Main Road, among others, is underlain by prime farmland soils. In many areas, prime farmland soils are limited by a seasonally high water table. Pockets of soils with severe constraints to development other than hydric soils are found along the coastline, as beaches or rocky shore.

Development on prime farmland soils is generally attractive because permitting requirements are generally few when soils are flat, well-drained etc., and land development costs are usually lower with less site work involved. Impacts to the community which may be associated with development on these soils are not necessarily low, however, and may include loss of water purification capability, loss of visual and scenic qualities, loss of open field and field edge type habitats, economic impacts in terms of the loss of active agricultural businesses, and others.

Techniques the Town may consider to avoid significant impacts from farmland soil development include land acquisition programs, conservation restrictions, purchase of development rights, design guidelines, and visual easements. The Town's Agricultural Conservancy Trust and the Sakonnet Preservation Association have been actively pursuing the preservation of farm and open space property throughout the Town. The Trust utilizes outright purchase or acquisition of development rights as their primary preservation techniques. It also may receive land donations.

### **5.5 Vegetation and Wildlife**

The vegetation and wildlife populations of Little Compton's uplands reflect the past use of the land which was determined, to a great extent, by the underlying soils. The east side of Little Compton is mostly woodland. Much of this area was farmland at one time but, having poorer soils, these farms were abandoned. Some of the soils in this section of Town were so poorly suited for crops that they were never farmed, serving instead as woodlots. The types of woodland communities developing along the eastern side of Little Compton depend on the topography. Hardwood forest types, and the wildlife populations associated with them, are found on higher ground. Stands of black gum and tupelo are found in low areas with wet soil types and wooded swamps are dominated by red maple stands. The

woodlands provide suitable habitat for deer, grouse, woodcock, great horned owls, grey and red fox, raccoons, snowshoe rabbits, screech owls, flickers, and numerous species of song birds.

**Farmland** - Entering the Town from West Main Road, there are large tracts of land which are actively farmed or have recently become idle farmland. This area, stretching along the western side of the Town, has the most productive agricultural soils in the community. For the most part, they are more fertile and less stony than the soils underlying the eastern part of the Town.

Approximately one hundred years ago, at the height of Rhode Island's agrarian economy, more than 80 percent of all the land in the state was farmed. A variety of economic factors caused a decline in farming and a conversion of farms to other uses or simply a reversion to woodlands. Farms on better soils have tended to remain active while those on poorer soils have not, exemplified by the ongoing operation of the West Main Road farms.

Although much of the farm area is devoted to crops and does not have large areas of natural vegetation, the farms support a variety of wildlife. Stone walls dividing fields are often lined with native trees and shrubs, becoming narrow ribbons of woodland crisscrossing the agricultural land. These field borders, and upland areas associated with them, support wildlife including pheasants, quail, redtail hawks, sparrow hawks, doves, and woodcock. In addition to avian species, these areas are also inhabited by a number of mammals which typically exist in Rhode Island, i.e., fox, rabbit, skunk, woodchuck, deer, etc. The topography of the farms is not uniform and many have wet lowlands that are unsuitable for agriculture. Such wetlands and the land immediately surrounding them provide another valuable type of wildlife habitat. Animals utilizing these habitats include wood ducks, black ducks, mallards, snipe, rails, egrets, ibis, herons, kingfishers, marsh hawks, muskrats, mink and otter.

The West Main Road farms not only provide wildlife habitat but also afford spectacular views of the Sakonnet River by virtue of their tree-less terrain. If these farms become idle, natural plant succession would occur in the fields, or these areas may be developed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This is not to exclude the possibility that this land may revert to farming use in the future. However, recent experience in Rhode Island supports the finding that farmland which ceases to be used for farming purposes is more likely to be developed as a more intensive land use unless it is protected by easement, development rights, etc.

Eventually tall trees or structures may interrupt the views of the river and eliminate the feeling of openness now experienced when traveling West Main Road. These farms are an important part of Little Compton's character, and have been identified by RIDEM as deserving high priority for preservation. The Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust is aggressively attempting to preserve this unique facet of the community and other farms throughout the Town. Similar woodlands can be seen in the central part of Town, in the vicinity of Swamp Road. The Sakonnet Preservation Association has acquired and permanently preserved numerous woodlands throughout the Town ensuring that they will always remain wildlife habitat and will provide passive recreation areas for activities compatible with a conservation area.

### **5.5.a Habitat Maintenance**

Critical to the continuance of common wildlife species in Little Compton is preservation of habitat diversity, that is the different types of vegetation which provide living space for organisms. Wildlife diversity depends upon habitat for food and cover, water sources and specific climatic, topographic and geographic conditions.<sup>51</sup> Vegetation and aquatic systems are the most important features of the environment for most forms of wildlife.<sup>52</sup> In Little Compton, preservation of habitat diversity should include measures which will maintain large areas of undisturbed land. Maintaining ecological stability should be a consideration in open space protection efforts, and in the development review process. Overall, the Town should try to maintain the balance of vegetational cover types in the community, i.e., forest, wetland, open field etc.<sup>53</sup> In planning for future open space protection actions, consideration should be given to preserving large undisturbed areas and connecting future acquisitions with existing protected areas. In development review processes, habitat values should be included *as an* element for inclusion in subdivision and/or site plan reviews.

### **5.5.b Rare and Endangered Species and Habitats**

The historical and current status of species of plants and animals suspected of being rare or declining has been monitored for the past decade by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program (NHP). According to the NHP, there are 25 rare and exemplary natural com-

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<sup>51</sup> Planning for Wildlife, A Design Guide for Wildlife Protection and Conservation for Transportation Facilities, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, 1976, page 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 7

<sup>53</sup> The most recent figures available for these cover types indicate approximately 4,800 acres of agriculture or open land (33 percent of total land area), 7,000 acres of forest land (49 percent of total land area), and 1,400 acres of wetland (10 percent of total land area). Remote Sensing Land Use and Vegetative Cover in Rhode Island, William P. MacConnell, University of Massachusetts, Cooperative Extension Service Bulletin No. 200, July, L974.

munities (wildlife, flora and fauna) occurring in Little Compton.<sup>54</sup> They are shown on Table 5-1.

The term "State Endangered" indicates a native species in imminent danger of extirpation from Rhode Island. State threatened denotes native species which are likely to become state endangered in the future if current trends in habitat loss or other detrimental factors

Table 5-1  
Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Communities in Little Compton

1.	Piping Plover	Federally Threatened
2.	Roseate Tern	Federally Threatened
3.	Sandplain Gerardia	Federally Endangered
4.	Pale Green Orchid	State Endangered
5.	Lizard's Tail	State Endangered
6.	Grasshopper Sparrow	State Threatened
7.	Common Barn Owl	State Threatened
8.	Scotch Lovage	State Threatened
9.	Seabeach Knotweed	State Threatened
10.	Blue-winged Teal	Species of State Interest
11.	Marsh Wren	Species of State Interest
12.	Double-crested Cormorant	Species of State Interest
13.	Sora	Species of State Interest
14.	Least Tern	Species of State Interest
15.	Wild Leek	Species of State Interest
16.	False Dragonhead	Species of State Interest
17.	Saltmarsh Bulrush	Species of State Interest
18.	Leafy Bulrush	Species of State Interest
19.	Seaside Sparrow	Species of Concern
20.	Gadwall	Species of Concern
21.	Seaside Gerardia	Species of Concern
22.	Tall Wormwood	Species of Concern
23.	Mudwort	Species of Concern
24.	Seabeach Amaranth	State Historical
25.	Pied-billed Grebe	State Extirpated

Source: Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Natural Heritage Program, October, 1990

remain unchanged. Species of State Interest are those native species not considered State Endangered or Threatened at the present time, but occur in 6 to 10 sites in the State. Species of concern are native species which do not apply under the above categories but are additionally listed by the Natural Heritage Program due to various factors of rarity and/or vulnerability, or for which status information is presently not well known. Species listed

<sup>54</sup> Correspondence dated October 3, 1990, to Albert Veri & Associates, Inc., from Joanne Michaud, Natural Heritage Program, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

as State Historical are those which have been documented for the State during the last 100 years, but for which no current occurrences are known.

### 5.5.c Sites of Particular interest

The NHP and Audubon Society notes the following sites to be of particular interest as unique habitat sites:<sup>55</sup>

- **Quicksand Pond/Goosewing Beach** - considered to be one of the most important natural areas in Rhode Island, ranking eighth of 142 sites Statewide in terms of biological diversity and urgency of protection. The fine examples of coastal pond/saltmarsh and coastal sand dune/beach communities provide valuable habitat for at least two rare shorebird species and five rare plant species. The natural cycle of opening and closing the breachway maintains a healthy system of mudflats, which provide habitat for rare flora, as well as supporting an invertebrate population essential for the shorebirds' survival. A successful protection campaign by the Goosewing Preservation Coalition has reduced the threats to the beach/dune area; the remaining threat of disturbance by recreational users is being addressed by the ongoing warden/fencing/posting program. Protection efforts for the Quicksand Pond system should be concentrated on the preservation and management of the wetlands which feed into the Pond, including adjacent Colebrook, where the State's only occurrence of the rare plant Saururus cernuus (Lizard's Tail) is found.
  - **Brigg's Marsh/Truesdale Beach**, ranked 21st of 142 sites, provides similar habitat for rare nesting shorebirds and flora. Likewise, management of human visitors is needed, although the recreational pressures here are not as intense as at Goosewing.
- The rocky shorelines of West and East Islands** provide significant bird nesting sites. Limited access and low development potential serve to protect these areas at the present time.
- **Fogland Marsh**, the wetland surrounding Almy Brook, is primarily owned by The Nature Conservancy and RIDEM. It is considered one of the best quality saltmarshes

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<sup>55</sup> Correspondence dated October 3, 1990, to Albert Veri & Associates, Inc., from Joanne Michaud, Natural Heritage Program, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. Audubon Society Inventory of Unique Natural Areas in Rhode Island.

in the state, never having been ditched or drained for mosquito control, and thus serves as a fertile nursery for fm and shell fish, and critical habitat for wading birds and shorebirds.

- Sakonnet Point - the most southerly point of land in Little Compton, this area is composed almost entirely of rock outcrop extending into the sea. The area is highly scenic and supports considerable fishing, sightseeing and diving activity. It is an important contributor to the coastal features of the State.

These sites would benefit from additional protection in the form of protective zoning, acquisition of buffer zones, and through an increase in setbacks.

Preserving biological diversity through the protection and management of state- and federally-listed rare species habitat areas and ecologically significant natural communities is an important objective of the Comprehensive Plan. The Town should consider maintaining contact with the Natural Heritage Program regarding the above sites and naming the Natural Heritage Program as a reviewing agency in the establishment of any environmental impact review process. This would help establish the framework for protection of rare species occurrences discovered after the completion of the Plan, as well as review of projects planned for those known habitat areas which have not yet been protected.<sup>56</sup>

### 5.6 Visual and Aesthetic Resources

"Sense of place" comes from a recognized character or uniqueness of an area, which makes it special to residents or visitors to that area. Attributes which provide a sense of place are based on the following:<sup>57</sup>

- Aspects of the existing natural environment such as land form and topography, climate, and the presence of water;
- Cultural expressions such as bridges, churches or other features which are a reaction to landscape, social history, physical location, human activities; and,
- The visual interaction of culture with the existing landscape.

<sup>56</sup> Statement of Goals/Checklist for Inclusion of Rare Species Data, Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

<sup>57</sup> Garnham, Harry Launce, Maintaining the Spirit of Place, A Process for the Preservation of Town Character, 1985, page 1.



Little Compton's sense of place can be identified with its Town center, the many farm fields lining its roadways, views to the water, its coastline and its beaches. These features, which represent the spirit of a community, have and will continue to change as the Town grows and its population expands. Transportation system expansion, shifts in population, real estate speculation and other activities place pressure on the Town's visual integrity. The Town must guide these changes to avoid destroying the original character of the place.

Visual quality in the environment makes a significant contribution to the Town's overall quality of life. The character and interplay between topographic features, natural and man-made landmarks, the form of open space and development, as well as historic and culturally meaningful structures and sites, has created a community identity unlike any other in Rhode Island.

Incongruous elements in, or aberrations to this perceived landscape or the lack of a perceivable form and order adversely affects residents' and visitors' attitudes toward the community. As such, the erosion of the visual and cultural character of a community can have not only psychological impacts, but also economic impacts through depreciated real estate and failing marketability to prospective new businesses and residents.

### **5 6.a Rhode Island Landscape Inventory**

The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory published by RIDEM in 1990 identified a number of important views and vistas in Little Compton. Criteria by which these sites were identified were complex, but essentially included the following:

- Common or typical natural/cultural or historical features of the Town's landscape;
- Distinctive or unique natural landscapes of high scenic quality in the Town, eg., areas of outstanding topographic and geologic features, areas with a variety of natural or pastoral vegetation, lakes, ponds, rivers, wetlands which are pristine, untouched and unpolluted;
- Cultural and historical features - specific locations which are the most distinctive or unique landscapes of high scenic quality which have cultural and historical value -eg., historic farm, estate;
- Scenic views - the most scenic views in the Town, from a hilltop, across water, across a large scenic tract of open space etc.

Little Compton sites included in this report were:<sup>58</sup>

- Harold A. Watson Reservoir - 645 acres, well-sited farms and views to water,
- Little Compton Historic Center - 313 acres, historic, well-sited and well-maintained Town center;
- Old Stone Road/Crandall Road Farms (part in Tiverton) - 971 acres, open farm fields bordered by fieldstone walls;
- Quicksand Pond - 660 acres, excellent views across pond, varied vegetation; and,
- Little Compton agricultural lands - 4,401 acres, exquisite beaches, beautiful farms and homes.

The above sites do not form a complete list of scenic areas in Little Compton. Many more sites exist, and each individual is likely to have a different list of special views and vistas. Rather than attempt to identify a comprehensive list of sites, the intent here is to establish the understanding that such features contribute to the sense of place in Little Compton and its overall quality of life.

### **5.6.b Landscape Protection**

Efforts which focus on identifying, protecting and preserving the landscape are one way to maintain a balance between the preservation of the traditional landscape and demands for new development.<sup>59</sup> Because of the large sums involved, many communities are moving away from the traditional method of preserving open space, i.e., acquisition. Techniques such as conservation restrictions, limited development techniques, visual easements, transfer of development rights, scenic criteria built into zoning regulations, and public education programs help to maintain the quality of the scenic landscape. Establishing a local committee/commission with the responsibility of identifying areas with scenic vistas, and establishing design guidelines or protective measures for these areas will help to direct these efforts.

### **5.6.c Scenic Roadways**

The importance of views from Little Compton's roadways should not be overlooked. Farmland lining West Main Road afford outstanding views of the Sakonnet River, and many other routes provide interesting and attractive views of farmland, the shoreline, for-

<sup>58</sup>The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, January, 1990.

<sup>59</sup>The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, January, 1990.

est, fields and other natural areas, among many. Roadways should also be considered as important connectors between activity nodes in the Town, for example, the routes between the Town Center and the beaches and Sakonnet Harbor, and the gateways into the community. The Town's roads may be considered integral elements of an interconnected linear greenspace system.

Maintaining the visual quality of Little Compton's roadways is critical to ensure the scenic beauty of the Town. Designating roadways and vistas as "scenic roads" is a method of protecting the visual values of the roadways. State highways may be designated as scenic roads by the State's Scenic Highway Board.

Once the roads are identified, application is made to the Board through the R.I. Department of Transportation. Although there is question as to the actual authority provided with the scenic road designation, the intent is to allow the town to communicate to RIDOT that future road improvements must be sensitive to the visual quality of the corridor.<sup>60</sup>

Little Compton should pursue the protection of other visually important spaces through a variety of techniques, including, but not limited to:

- Purchase of development rights - acquisition of a conservation easement for the rights of development of a parcel to ensure preservation of the property as an undeveloped open space in perpetuity.
- Visual easements - a conservation restriction or easement which protects the visual or scenic elements of a parcel of land;
- Public education.
- Gifts to the Sakonnet Preservation Association and the Agricultural Conservancy Trust.

### **5.7 Natural Resource Issues, Goals and Recommendations**

The issues facing the Town are defined in terms of the original goals of the Natural and Cultural Resources Subcommittee, followed by some discussion about them, a review of state regulations currently in force to protect some of those resources; and some possible strategies to be considered.

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<sup>60</sup>The rules and regulations of scenic road designation are in the process of being revised. The Town should follow the progress of these changes.

### 5.7.a Goals

- A. To preserve the Town's drinking water quality and protect its limited sources of supply.
- B. To conserve the Town's valuable natural resources, restore and protect its ecological systems, including but not limited to valuable wetland areas, the entire coastal environment, and rare and endangered species.
- C. To monitor and, where necessary, to regulate development that would present a potential hazard to public health or safety.
- D. To provide for orderly development which would preserve the attractive natural and rural character of the community.
- E. To ensure that the local planning process is aimed at restoring and protecting natural resources and that future development shall respect these valuable resources, i.e. ground water quality, including soils, wetlands, streams and ponds, the shoreline, open spaces and visual quality.

## Water Resources

### Groundwater - Issues

- All residents of the Town of Little Compton rely on groundwater for drinking water and other domestic purposes. They are the joint custodians of their commonly held groundwater resource.
- Wells dug in till have low and often variable yields. Till may become unsaturated during dry periods of summer and fall, and is generally an unreliable source of water in many areas. In Little Compton, some older homes may have shallow wells in till, but new homes generally have wells drilled into bedrock.
- There are *no groundwater reservoirs* located in Little Compton. (A groundwater reservoir is defined by RIDEM as an area of stratified drift with a saturated thickness of 40 feet or greater, and an average transmissivity of 4,000 square feet per day or greater.)
- There is growing concern about the adequacy of water yields in wells in certain areas of Little Compton.
- Overall, the Town's groundwater quality is generally good, attributable to the generally low density of development and the lack of major industrial and commercial development

- High soil fertility and healthy wetlands are the purification and filtering systems for the maintenance of groundwater quality. The upper foot of native soil is the major treatment zone for potential groundwater pollutants.
- The primary threats to groundwater quality in Little Compton are individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS), leaking underground storage tanks either not identified by or registered with RIDEM, and nonpoint sources such as certain fertilizers and pesticides.

Buffering wetlands from areas of human activity will help remove additional pollutants before they reach wetlands. Many states have established ranking systems to determine appropriate buffer widths, based on a wide range of appropriate criteria (eg. soil conditions; slope; quantity, type and quality of vegetation; potential water quality impacts). A review and evaluation of buffer widths should be a priority undertaking for the town.

- Point pollution sources previously identified by RIDEM in Little Compton include the Town transfer station, the State salt storage site, and leaking underground fuel storage tanks. The inventory is not all-encompassing - additional potential contamination sources are likely to exist.
- The State requires that underground storage tanks holding 1,100+ gallons must be registered. The Town has identified a particular concern relating to underground fuel oil and gasoline storage tanks, particularly those not registered with the State. As of February 1992, the Town requires registration of all tanks regardless of size.

Nonpoint sources of pollution include failing septic systems, certain pesticides and fertilizers, road salt application, radon and atmospherically-borne pollutants. The Town should develop ordinances which supplement the State groundwater protection laws and pursue measures to identify, reduce or eliminate such nonpoint sources of pollution.

Nitrates are introduced to the groundwater through rainfall, individual septic systems and through certain fertilizers applied both for agricultural and residential purposes. The cumulative impact of nitrates including the relative rates of build-up versus dissipation and filtration are not fully understood and therefore are causes for concern and require further study and monitoring.

Determination of the amount of nitrates which may potentially be introduced to the groundwater from a particular activity has been modelled in nitrogen loading studies.

### **Groundwater - Recommendations**

- 1. The Town should seriously consider establishing a Groundwater Protection Board** to deal specifically with issues concerning the Town's drinking water quality and sources of supply. (State enabling legislation should be sought to undertake any of the listed responsibilities not currently provided for under local authority). Among other responsibilities, this board should:
  - a. Be funded adequately and enabled to procure such professional staff and/or services as may be required to carry out its functions;

- b. Develop an overall master plan to address management and monitoring strategies for protection of the town's groundwater, including maintenance of its soil and wetland purification processes.
  - c. Assume responsibility for carrying forward the proposed hydrogeological study (see recommendation 2, below);
  - d. Assume administration of the proposed Wastewater Management District, if established (see recommendation 4, below);
  - e. Identify and map "critical environmental resource areas" (CERAs - containing freshwater wetlands, areas with high water tables, major ponds and watersheds, etc.) and develop and propose overlay zones within which an additional set of regulations will apply to ensure strict water resource protection<sup>1</sup>; and,  
Maintain an ongoing public information program, including annual reports to the Town Council.
2. In the intermediate term, **the Town should enlist public and/or private support to design a comprehensive hydrogeological study** that would help determine the flow and potential sources of contamination of the Town's freshwater supply, and its coastal wetlands and ponds.
- Such a study will help to provide basis for planning decisions affecting land use, housing, and the Town's overall growth patterns.
- a. The first step in this process -- a priority implementation action -- would be the compilation of the baseline data required for implementing this study.
  - b. This task should be one of the first actions of the proposed Groundwater Protection Board (see recommendation 1, above) when established. However, until it is established, the Planning Board and Conservation Commission should jointly form a "groundwater working group" to initiate and carry forward the data base compilation phase of the study.
3. If need is demonstrated, **establish a Town-wide Wastewater Management District** as provided for under State law, that would:
- a. Establish a well-testing program with voluntary monitoring program;
  - b. Identify and map septic systems and wells; and
  - c. Establish a cycle of inspection and if necessary and appropriate, pump out schedule for septic systems
4. **The Little Compton Conservation Commission should adopt a more proactive stance** and assume (or be given) greater responsibility for dealing with problems affecting a wide range of local conservation issues, with special emphasis on the quality and quantity of the Town's drinking water.

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<sup>1</sup> The Town will consider changing references to the "Groundwater Protection Board" to a "Water Resource Protection Board" in item L on p. 5-34 and elsewhere in the plan, where applicable.

- a. It should, together with the Planning Board, jointly form a "groundwater working group" responsible for initiating the data base compilation for the proposed hydrogeological study.
  - b. Work closely with the proposed Groundwater Protection Bond when established, to develop strategies for strengthening the Town's groundwater protection measures.
  - c. Develop and maintain a systematic review process for monitoring the significant conservation issues affecting the Town's health and safety, and its crucial environmental resources (i.e.: its wetlands, streams and coastal ponds, its soil fertility, vegetation and wildlife communities, endangered species, etc.; see for example recommendations 5.5, 5.10-5.14, 5.15-5.17, 5.25-5.31).
  - d. Work with other local agencies and conservation organizations to develop an ongoing public information program on these and other conservation issues.
5. **Maintain the Town's present 100-foot buffer** (between wetlands and structures and/or septic systems) pending the aforesaid hydrogeological study and development of a buffer ranking system for such setbacks.
6. **Encourage environmentally compatible agricultural techniques** among Little Compton residents and growers to reduce the residual (long term) pollution potential on groundwater resources from certain fertilizers and pesticides.
7. Build on the two-year groundwork laid by the Joint Committee on Environmental Concerns established by the town's two garden clubs and develop a high visibility public information and education program affecting a broad range of natural resource issues, including but not limited to:
- residual groundwater pollution inherent in the use of certain fertilizers and pesticides, heavy metals, paints solvents, oils and fuels,
  - toxic-substance source reduction by promoting non-toxic substitutes among the town's homeowners and businesses.
- Target audiences should include homeowners, lawn care workers, course grounds-keepers, landscapers and arborists, growers, contractors, light and heavy engine equipment users and mechanics, local boards and commissions, and the public at large.
8. Work with state agencies and environmental organizations to establish long-term monitoring of air and rain pollution to determine over time what pollutants are entering Little Compton's groundwater from long-range atmospheric sources.
9. Work with these same agencies to monitor coastal and inland waters, soils, wildlife and vegetation for signs of similar pollution from long-range atmospheric sources.

10. **Review present land use controls to ensure that activities potentially threatening to the environment are minimized.** To ensure the public health and safety, develop ordinances that specify responsible citizen action in the proper use, storage and disposal of the following:

- Oil based or enamel paints
- Alkaline or rechargeable nickel-cadmium batteries
- Thinners
- Solvents
- Stains
- Strippers
- Aerosols
- Degreasers
- Cleaners
- Waxes
- Polishes
- Poisons
- Petrochemical fertilizers
- Wood Preservatives
- Photo chemicals
- Chemistry sets
- Anti-freeze
- Rodenticides
- Mothballs
- Insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and molluscicides

11. **Maintain a capacity in fire and police departments** for rapid and appropriate response to small spills and other accidents involving hazardous materials.

12. **Properly store supplies of road salt** and consider environmentally acceptable substitute which does not threaten public health.

13. **Continue to pursue regulatory program based on State enabling legislation for existing underground storage tanks that are exempt from State regulations.** Tank removal should be implemented over the long term and tax incentives for rapid removal should be provided.

14. **Continue to maintain a collection center** for disposal of used motor oil.

#### Coastal Waters - Issues

- Coastal ponds include Quicksand Pond, Briggs Marsh, Round Pond, Little Pond, Watch House Pond, Tunipus Pond and Long Pond. These ponds are particularly susceptible to nitrate loading that may adversely impact water quality, and can in turn affect wildlife and plant habitat values. Many of the ponds are surrounded by estuarine emergent wetlands, typically salt marshes. Such ecosystems are very productive, support a variety of species of fish, and provide nesting, feeding and resting grounds for ducks and shorebirds. They are protected by CRMC regulations, U.S. Army Corps regulations, and local and state land acquisition programs.
- Quicksand Pond is the least disturbed coastal pond in Rhode Island. Consideration should be given to further protective efforts, i.e., land acquisition, buffering of tributary streams and the pond itself.

#### Coastal Waters - Recommendations

15. Maintain and improve the quality of coastal waters to protect the Little Compton shoreline for continued commercial fishing, tourism and recreational uses by:



- a. Continuing to pursue acquisition of key shoreline areas, particularly those important for habitat preservation, recreational opportunities, visual enhancement and public shoreline access.
  - b. Coordinate with RIDEM and CRMC to determine locations of public shoreline access.
16. Consideration should be given to further protective efforts for coastal ponds, including, land acquisition, buffering of tributary streams and the pond itself, and systematic monitoring to detect excessive nitrate loading.
17. Local setbacks of structures and/or septic systems from coastal ponds, inland waters (ponds and streams), and wetlands should be reviewed to determine the most appropriate buffer widths for resource protection (i.e., in connection with the aforesaid buffer ranking system - refer to Recommendation 5).

### **Inland Waters - Issues**

- Streams and ponds serve as part of the Town's natural drainage system, channeling overland runoff into wetlands, ponds, the Sakonnet River, and Rhode Island Sound. Maintaining adequate vegetated buffers is critical .

As the host community for the Watson Reservoir, Little Compton has the responsibility to ensure that activities in its watershed do not degrade the reservoir's quality. Maintaining vegetated buffers around the tributary streams which feed the reservoir will help maintain the water quality. Road salting methods should be investigated to ensure they are suitable for use within the watershed.

- Wetlands provide several important functions that include water quality, maintenance of wildlife and aesthetic values. In terms of water quality maintenance, wetlands contribute towards pollution filtration, sediment removal, oxygen production, nutrient recycling, chemical and nutrient absorption, and groundwater recharge. In addition, wetlands contribute towards flood control, wave damage protection, and shoreline erosion control. Wetlands also protect livestock grazing, fish and shell-fishing, and provide recreational opportunities *as well as* education and scientific research.
- Wetlands are critical as wildlife and waterfowl habitat. Areas surrounding wetlands provide the seclusion waterfowl need to rest and carry out their activities without predation and disturbance.
- The type of wetland and its diversity plays an important role in determining its habitat value. Wetlands which now provide habitat to rare, threatened or endangered species should be given priority consideration for protection.
- Buffering wetlands from areas of human activity will help to remove additional pollutants before they reach the wetland. The Town provides for a buffer of 100 feet between structures and/or septic systems and wetlands. When the area to be disturbed is determined to be a significant wildlife habitat, a larger buffer may be appropriate.

### **Inland Waters - Recommendations**

- 18. Investigate road salting methods and sand/salt mixes** for both State and local roads to ensure they are suitable for use within the watershed. Monitor inland waters to detect excessive nitrate loading.
- 19. Wetlands which now provide habitat to rare, threatened or endangered species, and ensure groundwater protection, should be given priority consideration for protection.**
- 20. Maintain vegetated buffers around the tributary streams which feed the Watson Reservoir** to help maintain its water quality.

### **Flood Hazards - Issues**

- The entire coastline of Little Compton is vulnerable to flooding and severe wave action during powerful storms.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency has designated all shoreline areas in the Town as "V zones", which are areas subject to 100-year coastal flooding with potentially damaging wave action.
- Landward of the V zones are "A zones" which are also subject to flooding during 100-year storms, but are not exposed to wave action. Development in these areas is subject to damage or destruction during severe storms.
- Development in special flood hazard areas has the potential to reduce flood storage capacity by increasing the amount of impervious surface in a flood zone.
- The Town requires that any development in a flood hazard area (zones A or V), receive a building permit, and prohibits certain types of development in these areas.

## **Flood Hazards - Recommendation**

### **21. Maintain conformance with existing Federal, State and local flood hazard regulations.**

## **Soils**

### **Soils - Issues**

- Approximately 50 percent of the Town is comprised of prime agricultural soils, highly susceptible to development. Impacts may include loss of water purification capability, loss of visual and scenic qualities, loss of open field and field edge type habitat, economic impacts in terms of the loss of active agricultural businesses, and others.
- Techniques the Town may consider to avoid significant impacts from farmland development include land acquisition programs, conservation restrictions, purchase of development rights, designated prime farmland overlays, designated farmland districts, design guidelines, and visual easements.
- Presence of hydric soils on a development site should trigger further investigation of wetlands, and the potential impacts that such development may have on the function of the wetland.

### **Soils - Recommendations**

- 22. Continue public and private land acquisition programs, conservation restrictions, and the purchase of development rights, and adopt design guidelines, and visual easements, and designated farmland overlays and districts to avoid loss of farmland areas to development.**
- 23. Monitor, maintain and promote increased soil fertility** on a townwide basis to ensure groundwater purification.
- 24. Note the presence of hydric soils on the development application** in site plan and/or subdivision review at the preliminary stages to indicate the need for further investigation of wetlands.

## **Vegetation and Wildlife**

### **Vegetation and Wildlife - Issues**

- The vegetation and wildlife populations of Little Compton's uplands reflect the past use of the land which was determined, to a great extent, by the underlying soils.

The area along the western side of the Town has the most productive agricultural soils in the community.

- Farms on better soils have tended to remain active while those on poorer soils have not, exemplified by the ongoing operation of the West Main Road farms.
- Farms support a variety of wildlife.
- The West Main Road farms provide clear views of the Sakonnet River by virtue of their tree-less terrain.
- The West Main Road farms are an important part of Little Compton's character, and have been identified by RIDEM as deserving high priority for preservation.
- The eastern and central parts of Little Compton are mostly woodland. Hardwood forest types are found on higher ground. Stands of black gum are found in low areas with wet soil types and wooded swamps are dominated by red maple stands.
- Critical to the continuance of common wildlife species in Little Compton is preservation of habitat diversity.
- Wildlife diversity depends upon habitat for food and cover, water sources and specific climatic, topographic and geographic conditions.

Vegetation and aquatic systems are the most important features of the environment for most forms of wildlife.

- Preservation of habitat diversity should include measures which will maintain large areas of undisturbed land and buffers around areas of critical habitat.
- Maintaining ecological stability should be a consideration in open space protection efforts, and in the development review process.
- Monitoring of predator populations should be coordinated with RIDEM.
- The graceful Tupelo, or black gum tree, cleanses the soils through its root system and provides large crops of small berries for the birds.

### **Vegetation and Wildlife - Recommendations**

25. The Conservation Commission, in consultation with the State Natural Heritage Program, should prepare surveys of vegetation and wildlife communities. The plan should be reviewed periodically *as* new information becomes available to the Commission.
26. Endangered species, as covered below, should be a major component of the Vegetation and Wildlife Management Plans.
27. The surveys should be used as a guide by the Planning and Zoning Boards and the Town Council to determine potential adverse impacts on vegetation and wildlife communities in regard to land acquisition; any public use including outdoor recreation and building activity; changes in land use and zoning; and subdivision of land.

### Endangered Species - Issues

There are 25 rare and exemplary natural communities occurring in Little Compton. These include wildlife and plant communities that are native to this region and are in danger of extermination (see Table 5-1).

- The Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program (NHP) and Audubon Society notes the following sites to be of particular interest as habitat for rare and endangered species, or as unique examples of specific habitats: Quicksand Pond/Goosewing Beach, Brigg's Marsh/Truesdale Beach, West and East Islands, Fogland Marsh, Sakonnet Point.
- Preserving biological diversity through the protection and management of rare and endangered species habitat areas and ecologically significant natural communities is an important natural resources objective.

### Endangered Species - Recommendations

28. **The Conservation Commission should coordinate with Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program and the Rhode Island Audubon Society** on a regular basis to determine sensitive habitat locations of the town's endangered species.
29. **Protection and management recommendations for each identified habitat location should be developed** in coordination with the Rhode Island NHP and maps should be prepared identifying these locations.
30. **The following sites should be reviewed periodically with the NHP** for additional habitat protection: Quicksand Pond/Goosewing Beach, Brigg's Marsh/Truesdale Beach, West and East Islands, Fogland Marsh, Sakonnet Point, and the Mill Pond in Adamsville.

### Visual and Aesthetic Resources

#### Visual and Aesthetic Resources - Issues

- Scenic and aesthetic qualities are an important part of what residents consistently value highly about the Town.
- Nearly two-thirds of the respondents in the 1990 phone survey said it was Little Compton's "rural character" that appealed to them most about the Town.
- Little Compton's sense of place can be identified with its Town center, the many farm fields lining its roadways, views to the water, its coastline and its beaches. Transportation system expansion, shifts in population, real estate speculation and other activities place pressure on the Town's visual integrity. The Town must guide these changes to avoid destroying the original character of the place.
- Visual quality in the environment makes a significant contribution to the Town's overall quality of life. The character and interplay between topographic features,

natural and man-made landmarks, the form of open space and development, as well as historic and culturally meaningful structures and sites, has created a community identity unlike any other in Rhode Island.

- Erosion of the visual and cultural character of a community can have not only psychological impacts, but also economic impacts through depreciated real estate and failing marketability to prospective new businesses and residents.
- The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory published by RIDEM identifies a number of important views and vistas in Little Compton. They do not form a complete list of scenic areas in Little Compton; the intent into establish the understanding that such features contribute to the sense of place and its overall quality of life.
- West Main Road affords outstanding views of the Sakonnet River, and many other State and local routes provide interesting and attractive views.
- Roadways should also be considered as important connectors between activity centers in the Town.
- Focusing on identifying, protecting and preserving the historic working landscape is one way to maintain a balance between the preservation of the historic working landscape and demands for new development.
- Maintaining the visual quality of Little Compton's roadways is critical to ensure the scenic beauty of the Town.

### Visual and Aesthetic Resources - Recommendations

31. **Under the proposed Historical Preservation Advisory Board (see recommendation 36 under cultural resources), encourage increased citizen interest in and concern with activities that affect the Town's visual environment;** when established, the Historical Preservation Advisory Board should consider forming a special subcommittee on Visual Environmental Impact which, among other things could:
  - a) Identify areas of town with outstanding scenic vistas, (i.e. countryside or coastal viewpoint areas), which should be reviewed by the Board and other appropriate town bodies when development or construction is being considered.
  - b) Work on appropriate "design guidelines" for construction in those areas.
  - c) Create a public informational tool (i.e., a "citizen's guide for preserving Little Compton's scenic landscape") to educate residents on ways they can help preserve this critical natural resource.
  - d) Consider the creation of "overlay districts" along scenic roads to identify special visual and aesthetic features (such as trees and other vegetation, stone walls, outstanding views, etc.), and the development of design guidelines for new construction in these areas. (Such guidelines might address both the road bed and road side, as well as adjoining land uses.)

32. Support and encourage the continued efforts of the Little Compton Agricultural Trust and the Sakonnet Preservation Association to preserve the Town's open spaces, and other areas of natural and scenic beauty in the Town.
33. Develop educational material and other programs to maintain and increase the current acreage of the town's working farmland. Use designated prime farmland overlays and active agricultural districts to encourage the continued use of property as agricultural and allow for limited density residential development.
34. Little Compton should pursue the protection of other visually important spaces through a variety of techniques, including, but not limited to:
  - Purchase acquisition of land;
  - Purchase conservation easements;
  - Purchase of development rights;
  - Visual easements or "overlay districts/zones;"
  - Gifts to the Sakonnet Preservation Association and the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust; and
  - Public education.

## General Recommendations

35. **Consider creating the position of the Town Planner** in the town's administrative structure on a full (or at least, part) time basis.
36. **The Town Council should consider appointing an Environmental Advocate** for Little Compton as provided under the State's Environmental Advocacy Act.
37. **Work together with Tiverton, Westport and the Newport Water Board** to maintain regional environmental and groundwater quality.

## 5.8 Cultural Resources

Little Compton's cultural resources include historical, archaeological, landscape and architectural elements, as well as religious and institutional resources. A recent report entitled the "*Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*" published in 1990 by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (RIHPC) provides a comprehensive summary of the Town's historical and architectural resources.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the cultural resources section of this element is to protect and preserve the Town's historic and archaeological resources and to integrate historic preservation into the comprehensive planning process. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act states that this element "shall include policies for the protection of historic and cultural resources of the municipality and the state. In addition, the element includes information and recommendations regarding other cultural activities and resources.

The cultural integrity of Little Compton has been preserved partly because of its remote location, removed from the secondary development pressures often created by new transportation corridors, railways and the like. Its character in Rhode Island is unique. Stonewalled farms, traditional houses, an historic village common, outstanding summer homes, many of unique architecture, intermixed with its environmental qualities brings Little Compton its status as a special coastal New England community.

The *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island* report notes "Few towns in New England can tell so well the story that Little Compton does. Architecturally, the town is home to notable seventeenth and eighteenth century structures, modest yet important civic buildings, nineteenth century farm complexes, and exceptionally well-done country houses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historically, it documents many phases of New England's rural, agricultural and recreational past that have long since disappeared elsewhere. Above all, its historical legacy, a pre-eminent part of the town's collective consciousness, and its natural setting remain mutually balanced and enhanced."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 34.



### 5.8.a Local History<sup>3</sup>

The history of Little Compton begins about 14,000 years ago, as the Buzzards Bay lobe of the great Laurentide Ice Sheet began to melt away to the north. Previously covered by ice up to a mile thick, the topography of the town began to emerge as a series of long low hills called glacial drumlins. These fertile, gently sloping ridges stretch north to south and are bounded by the waters of the Sakonnet River to the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the south. The drumlins are separated from each other by swales or drainage ways that flow to the ocean.

As the sea level rose to its present height, the drumlins' southern edges became exposed to the sea. Erosive forces cut into the ridges and created headlands, such as Warrens Point and Briggs Point overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The material eroded from these headlands was washed by the waves and redeposited across the drainage ways to form the barrier beaches. Their outlet to the ocean now blocked, the inland side of these low areas filled with water to form coastal ponds. Together, these headlands, barrier beaches and coastal ponds comprise a significant portion of the town's recreational and open space resources.

The first humans to arrive in Little Compton were temporary summer visitors, though they could hardly be considered vacationers. Nomadic hunting parties of Native American Indians pursued migratory herds of caribou and other game across southern New England. The first full-time residents were Native American Indians of the Archaic Period. These hunters and gatherers arrived and settled the area about 5,000 years ago. They used stone bowls and other stone cookware, harvested nuts from the recently established hardwood forests and caught fish in large scale weirs or traps. About 2,000 years ago, new American Indian settlers arrived from the Ohio River Valley and mingled with the Archaic peoples. They brought with them two notable technologies: ceramics and agriculture. Little Compton is rich in prehistoric artifacts from the culture of this period, known as the Woodland Period.

By the late 1670's immigrant English farmers arrived from the nearby, newly founded communities of Plymouth and Duxbury. On hand to greet them was the Sogkonate tribe, heirs to the Woodland Culture. Relations were peaceful and the land, destined to soon become the town of Little Compton, was quickly "purchased" by the English.

Sogkonate culture and population rapidly diminished. Within 100 years, less than 30 members of the tribe remained and the last Sogkonate died in 1827.

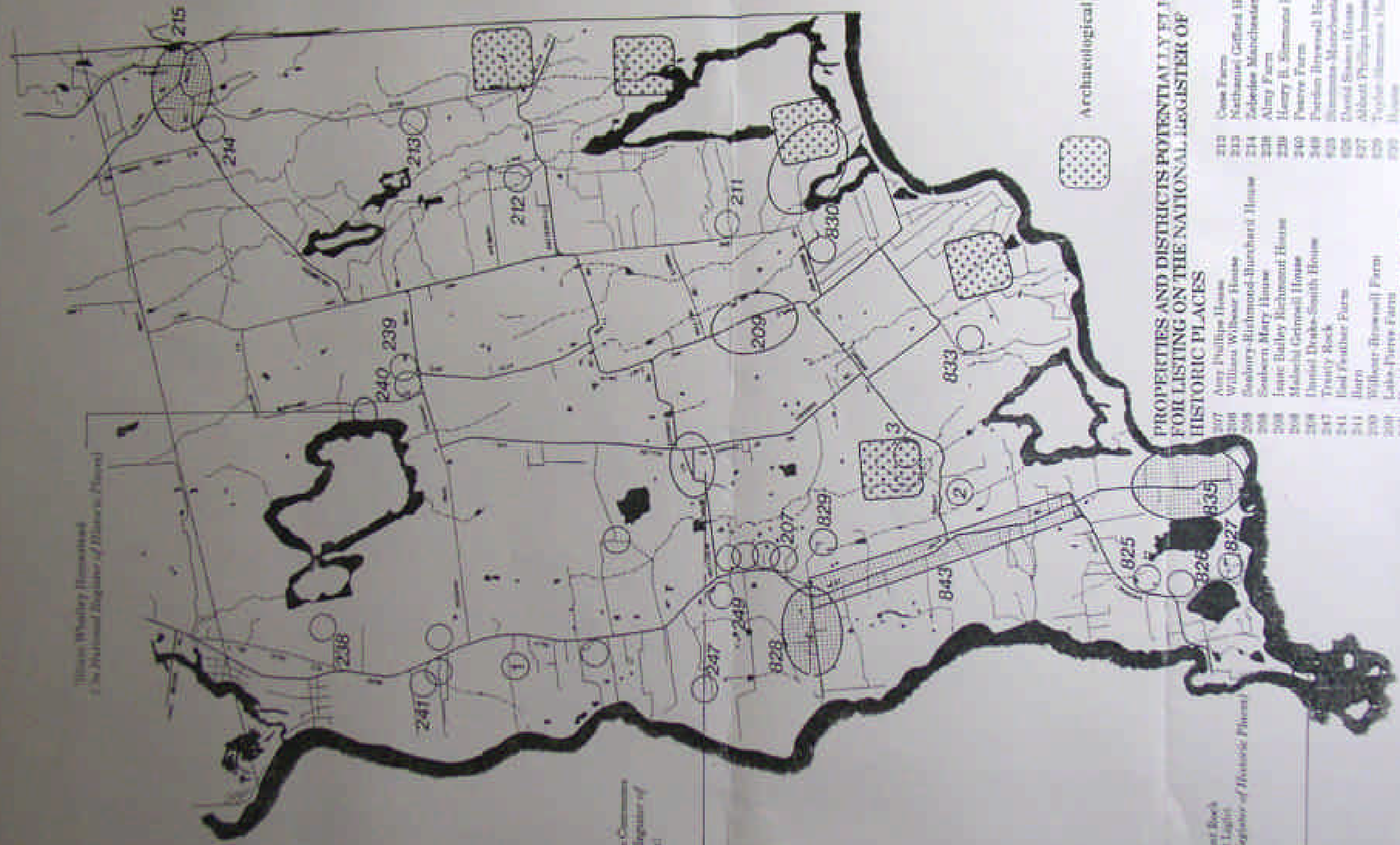
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<sup>3</sup> Excerpted from the *Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan, Town of Little Compton, Rhode Island, May, 1989.*

Woods Wharf, Remnants  
Of National Register of Historic Places

Little Compton Center  
On National Register of  
Historic Places

Little Compton Cove  
National Point Light  
On National Register of Historic Places



Archaeological Site

PROPERTIES AND DISTRICTS POTENTIALLY ELIGIBLE FOR LISTING ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

207	Avery Phillips House	212	Cove Farm
208	William Wilcox House	213	Nathaniel Gilbert House
209	Salisbury-Richmond-Burchard House	214	Salisbury Manse
210	Sonsbeary Mary House	215	Almy Farm
211	Jane Bailey Richmond House	216	Henry B. Simmons House
212	Malachi Gerrish House	217	Pease Farm
213	David Drake-Smith House	218	British Episcopal House
214	Trinity Rock	219	Simmons-Manchester House
215	East Pease Farm	220	David Blake House
216	Barn	221	Albion Phillips House
217	William Brownell Farm	222	Taylor Simmons House
218	Lake-Pease Farm	223	Blake Farm
219	Peckham-Brownell-Dyer Farm	224	Walter Smith
220	John Squire Farm	225	Richard Lee Farm
221	J. Edward Newton residence	226	Worcester Park House
222	P.C. Southwick residence	227	Walter Smith
223	Abnerville Hubert District	228	Walter Smith
224	Timber's Lane Historic District		

The town's new residents were primarily farmers and they established their farmsteads atop the rich glacial drumlins. Along the crests and sides of these ridges they also laid out many of the town's streets. As the woods were cleared, dramatic views across stone walls and rolling fields were created. Sections of West Main Road, Willow Avenue/South of Commons, and East Main Road/Maple Avenue provide good examples. Today, substantial portions of this scenic working landscape remain, although threatened by development as is the open character of the town.

By 1860 summer visitors were beginning to make use of the recreational assets of Little Compton. This trend became so well-established that on September 18, 1868 the *New Bedford Standard Times* made note:

"Those individuals who come here seeking health and strength, with those who make annual visits to this favorite summer resort for pleasure, have nearly all returned to their homes. The mermaids and mermen have laid aside their sea robes and disappeared landward. The season for bathing, sailing, croqueting, clam-baking and other outdoor amusements is nearly passed."

The early summer visitors often boarded with local farm families but soon began building or purchasing vacation homes of their own, a practice which continues today.

About 1890 a steamship line began service from Providence to Sakonnet Point, which continued for almost 30 years. Along with freight and the previously mentioned summer folk, the steamships brought something new to the town's recreational scene, "day trippers."

A substantial hotel and dinner pavilion were built to entertain the tourists and, by the turn of the century, Sakonnet Harbor boiled with activity at the height of the season.

As the automobile became popular, other parts of the town became accessible to the day trippers. Today their influence is felt most noticeably along the South Shore and Goosewing Beaches, the Commons, the Sakonnet River rights-of-way at Taylors' Lane and Town Way, as well as Sakonnet Point where it all began.

The eventual decline in steamship service left Sakonnet Harbor to the commercial fishing industry and recreational boaters. For many years space and facilities in the harbor were adequate for both these interests. Now however, the expansion of traditional uses of the harbor threatens to cause conflicts due to space limitations. While the community wishes to accommodate both needs, these issues remain unresolved.

The improved roads and overland transportation which put an end to the steamers had a beneficial effect on the town's farmers.

By 1900, Little Compton counted 162 foreign born residents, of them 60 percent Portuguese, 20 percent English or Scot and less than ten percent Irish. The Portuguese were the only nineteenth-century immigrant group to come to Little Compton in significant numbers. Arriving by the late 1870's from both the mainland and the Azores, they worked almost exclusively as farm hands. According to census data, they remained, unlike the Irish before them. By the early twentieth century, they had begun to establish themselves by acquiring property and continuing to farm--not as farm hands, but as proprietors. Further, the Portuguese community led the way to the formation of the town's first Roman Catholic Church, St. Catherine of Siena, established in 1910.

Toward the close of the 19th century, local farmers had developed a successful poultry industry. It was during this time that the famous Rhode Island Red breed of fowl was developed here. As this enterprise became unprofitable in the 1920's, good roads, and dependable trucks enabled farmers to move fresh milk quickly to market. Throughout the town, dairy farms flourished and the Little Compton landscape became well-endowed with pastoral scenes featuring large barns, rustic silos and herds of cows.

In 1940, the United States government purchased three parcels of land in the south end of town for military fortifications. Known collectively as Fort Church, these three parcels were located on both sides of West Main Road south of Swamp Road. Each of the three sections, located on high ground, was armed with eight- or sixteen-inch guns and prepared to defend the coastline in the event of an attack by hostile forces. These buildings were designed as farm complexes to avoid detection from the air. In the late 1940's they reverted to private ownership.

By the 1960's, changing economic conditions forced many large land users out of business. Today agriculture in Little Compton is diverse, though generally small in scale, and is encountering considerable pressure from residential development.

Finally, within the past 20 or 30 years, another small but significant wave of newcomers has arrived in Little Compton. Retired persons, many of whom were former summer visitors, make up a growing segment of the town's residential community.

The serious challenge facing this community in the closing years of the 20th century is to preserve the recreation, historic, conservation and open space resources while allowing for the reasonable growth and development of the town.

### **5.8.b Existing Historic and Archaeological Resources**

The *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island* identifies a selective list of sites, structures, objects, buildings and districts considered important to an understanding of the town's past and sense of place.<sup>4</sup> Some 280 +/- properties were included in this list, including 19 already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- William Whalley Homestead, ca. 1820, Burchard Avenue;
- United Congregational Church (1832, 1871, 1974, 1986), Commons;
- House, (1825, 1839, 1840), Commons;
- Mrs. Wilbur House, (ca. 1860), Commons;
- Old Burying Ground, (1675), Commons;
- Union Cemetery, (1850), Commons;
- Abram Wordell's Blacksmith Shop (late 19th century), Commons;
- Josephine F. Wilbour School (1929), Commons;
- Methodist Church (1840, 1872), Commons;
- Grange Hall (1902), Commons;
- Number 8 Schoolhouse (ca. 1845, 1986-87), Commons;
- Town Hall (1880-82), Commons;
- Brownell Library (1929, 1961-63), Commons;
- Oliver C. Brownell House (ca. 1850), Commons;

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpted from the *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990, page 39.

<sup>5</sup> The National Register of Historic Places includes the State's most important historic places, and is the official federal list of significant historic properties worthy of preservation. Benefits of being on the National Register include official recognition of the property's importance; eligibility to apply for federal planning and restoration grants when funds are available; eligibility for federal investment tax credits for certified substantial rehabilitations of income-producing properties; and protection from the adverse effects of state or federally funded or licensed projects through a review and assessment program. Listing on the Register does not require the owner to preserve or maintain the property. Unless the owner applies for and receives special federal or state benefits, she/he can do anything with the property which is permitted by local ordinances.

- Brownell House (18th century, 1823), Meetinghouse Lane;
- Wilbur's Store (early/mid-19th century, 1980) South of Commons Road;
- Brownell-Bailey-Richmond House (early 19th century), South of Commons Road; and,
- Sakonnet Point Light, Little Cormorant Rock.

There is one National Register Historic District in the town, the Commons area. Many of the above properties are contributing elements to that district.

Based upon initial research, a number of additional properties in the community appear to have the qualities necessary for inclusion in the Register. These properties, which are listed in the RIHPC study, require further investigation and documentation to determine their eligibility.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to those individual properties, the following areas deserve consideration as National Register Historic Districts:

- Adamsville Historic District
- Taylor's Lane Historic District
- Warren's Point Historic District
- West Main Road Historic District
- South of Commons Road

Figure 5-4 illustrates the approximate location of these historic properties and districts.

**Historic Landscape Resources** - Little Compton's landscape is truly one of the most unique in Rhode Island. It continues to be a good representation of the town's agricultural heritage, its one-time position as part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and as a popular summer resort. With this in mind, the RIHPC has identified a number of properties and areas which are considered outstanding from a landscape perspective, as follows:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990, page 36.

<sup>7</sup> Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Inventory of Historic Designed Landscapes in Rhode Island*, unpublished draft, obtained from MacKenzie Woodward, February, 1992.

- **Little Compton Commons** - an irregularly shaped lot bordered on all sides with commercial, religious, civic and residential buildings, forming the physical and spiritual center of the town. Reflects the town's connections to the Plymouth Colony and the settlement patterns of Massachusetts towns;
- **Edward Gray Homestead**, South Road (this property was not found) - according to Gardens of Colony and State, Edward Gray's son cleared many acres in Little Compton in 1694. In 1721 he died and left his widow "use of the new garden." The house and orchard were still standing in 1930, but this property was not found in the RIHPC survey;
- **William Peabody House**, West Main Road - house and grounds continue to reflect the open, pastoral landscape for which Little Compton is noted;
- **Isaac Richmond Residence**, South of Commons Road - best example of Victorian architecture and residential landscape design with large trees shading the wide expanses of lawn around the house;
- **Wilbour Woods** (Isaac Wilbour's Park) - this public park includes markers with names of Native Americans who had lived in the park. Picnic areas are similar to those constructed around Rhode Island under the WPA during the depression;
- **Seaconnet Point Farm** - platted in 1886 and again in 1895 was the largest and most creatively designed summer resort plat in Little Compton. Portions of the plat plan were developed and remain extant, however, a large number of lots in the western portion of the plat were purchased by the Lloyd family, reducing the overall housing density;
- **Watch House/Haffenreffer Estate**, Washington Road - the Watch House, constructed in the late 19th century, provided expansive views of the ocean to the west, south and east, and overlooked Watch House Pond to the north. The Watch House was heavily damaged in the 1938 hurricane, and during World War II, the site was used by the U.S. War Department as part of its fortification system. Mr. and Mrs. Carl Haffenreffer purchased the site in 1957, took down the old house and built a new house on top of the fortifications. The property today includes the main house and Sasaki-designed sheltered gardens, an in-ground swimming pool, carriage house, barn, greenhouse, and three guest houses. The buildings and gardens combine to form a modern estate landscape which continues the traditions of turn-of-the-century Rhode Island;
- **J. Edward Newton residence**, West Main Road - could be an excellent example of designer Fletcher Steele's use of space and vistas, however, most of the site today is covered with vines and shrub plantings. Driveway and octagonal entrance courtyard are unusual and interesting examples of Steele's non-traditional design sense;
- **F.C. Southworth residence**, Swamp Road - important example of smaller, early twentieth century residential development. A classic example of designer Arthur Shurcliff's interest in New England farmsteads translated onto smaller properties; and,
- **Bumble Bee Farm**, West Main Road - Designed in 1940, the site is not only an excellent example of Colonial Revival garden design, but another example of the

continued interest in the character, design and appreciation for Little Compton's privately maintained open space, geography, townscape and town history.

Wilbour Woods, the Southworth and Newton residences, and Bumble Bee Farm are being prepared by RIHPC for consideration for listing in the National Registers.<sup>8</sup>

**Archaeological Resources - RIHPC** has identified a number of archaeological sites in the town, shown on Figure 5-4. These include Indian burial sites as well as areas where chipping debris or flakes of stone have been found, indicating a pre-historic occupation. Several sites within the town are traditionally associated with the Indians.<sup>9</sup> None of these sites is listed on the National Register. There are likely many more archaeological sites which have not been identified or documented.

The generalization can be made that agricultural activity over the past 300 years has probably turned up many of the artifacts that are near the surface and some may still be waiting to be found. Also, it appears that most of the local Indian activity was along the coast where they gathered to fish and spend the summer. It is likely that there are artifacts still existing deeper in the earth and there is the possibility that any excavation may bring them to sight. Any excavation activity, especially along the coast, should be flagged to alert the participants to watch for and to report the signs of earlier activity, such as shell mounds, campsites or burial grounds. Changes in topography due to natural occurrences have altered the coast line so that activity within hundreds of feet from the present coast may be in an area that once was next to the water.

An archaeological site is usually documented only if required by law as part of a Federally-funded project, such as a new roadway or power line. Occasionally a property owner contacts RIHPC or the State Archaeologists Office with information on potential sites, and if warranted, a site visit is made.

**Cemeteries -** A list of cemeteries in Little Compton is attached as Appendix 5-B. Where known, a location on the town Tax maps is included. Some of them are located off the road, and may not be optimally maintained due to their location. There are other small plots even further removed from the roadside.

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<sup>8</sup> Per telephone conversation with Mack Woodward of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission on June 9, 1992. RIHPC is systematically nominating historic designed landscapes identified in the *Inventory of Historic Designed Landscapes in Rhode Island*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., page 4.



### **5.8.c Historic Preservation Activities**

The Little Compton Historical Society was founded in 1937 and adopted as its purpose "the preservation of landmarks and the identification of historical sites in the town of Little Compton, the encouragement of research into matters pertaining to the early and current history of the town, the assembling, acquisition and preservation of books, documents, paintings, photographs, agricultural equipment and other materials relating to Little Compton." Since 1955 the Society has been housed in the historic Wilbur House on West Main Road where it sponsors lectures and exhibits. Wilbur House is open for visiting during the summer season. The Society also maintains a farm museum, a 1725 school house and a Friends Meeting House.

The Adamsville Historical Association was formed in 1989 to maintain the historical character of the Historic District. To recognize the importance of the District, the Association applied for and received a grant from the R.I.H.P.C. to purchase and install colonial-type lampposts in the District. This grant was implemented over a three year period.

Currently, there is no historic district commission in Little Compton.

### **5.8.d Existing Resource Protection**

With the exception of those properties listed on the National Register, there are no explicit protections for historic/archaeological resources in Little Compton. Cultural resources are at risk in the absence of local authority to protect them.

The State Coastal Resources Management Council's stated policy is to, "where possible, preserve and protect significant historic and archaeological properties in the coastal zone...The Council shall require modification of, or shall prohibit, proposed actions subject to its jurisdiction where it finds a reasonable probability of adverse impacts on properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places...Prior to permitting actions subject to its jurisdiction on or adjacent to properties eligible for inclusion (but not actually listed in) the National Register of Historic Places, and/or areas designated as historically or archaeologically sensitive by the Historical Preservation Commission as the result of their predictive model, the Council shall solicit the recommendations of the Commission regarding possible adverse impacts on these properties."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The State of Rhode Island Coastal Resources *Management Program, As Amended, L990, page 64.*

**Responsible Agencies** - There are a number of boards, commissions and individuals within the town's administrative network which can, by their nature, contribute to the preservation of historic/archaeological resources in the community. The Planning and Zoning Boards, by their implicit involvement in land use decisions through zoning and subdivision regulations, as well as the Conservation Commission and the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, can have impact on the protection of cultural resources. Of course the town Council, through its role as policy- and law-maker for the community, has a continuing responsibility for resource protection activities of this kind. And, finally, educating the town's young people about its local history and traditions is a role the Little Compton Schools should undertake.

### **5.8.e Other Cultural Resources**

Other cultural resources play an important role in defining the town's identity. Special interest groups, locations within the community, and places of formal and informal assembly are all considered contributing cultural resources. A listing of cultural organizations and establishments follows (see Appendix 5-C):

#### **Artistic Groups**

- Sakonnet Painters Cooperative

#### **Churches**

- United Congregational Church
- St. Andrews by-the-sea Episcopal
- St. Catherine of Siena, Roman Catholic Church
- Old Stone Baptist Church

#### **Civic Improvement and Beautification Organizations**

- Little Compton Garden Club
- Sogkonate Garden Club
- Joint Committee on Environmental Issues (established by both garden clubs)
- Village Improvement Society
- Little Compton Community Center Inc.

#### **Seniors Groups**

- Little Compton Senior Citizens
- Tuesday Girls

#### **Young Peoples Groups**

- Teen Cafe

#### **Fraternal Groups**

- Little Compton Grange Patrons of Husbandry #32
- International Order of Odd Fellows
- International Order of Rebeccas

### **Health Groups**

- Little Compton Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Little Compton Nursing Association
- New Visions

### **Historical Societies**

- Adamsville Historical Association
- Little Compton Historical Society

### **Libraries**

- Brownell Library/Little Compton Public Library
- Wilbur/McMahon School Library

### **Local Government Agencies**

- Little Compton Conservation Commission
- Little Compton Planning Board
- Little Compton Zoning Board of Review
- Gymnasium/Auditorium Committee
- Little Compton School Committee
- Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust
- Little Compton Harbor Commission
- Little Compton Beach Commission
- Little Compton Tree Committee

### **Summer Organizations**

- Little Compton Summer Association

### **Veterans Groups**

- American Legion
- American Legion Auxiliary
- Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

### **Environmental Groups**

- Sakonnet Preservation Association

**The Artistic Community** - Little Compton has been home to recognized professional artists of all kinds for over a century. Visual artists in particular have found Little Compton's sea and sky landscape a compelling and inspiring place in which to work.

Today, as in the past, sweeping open pastoral vistas move, under dramatic weather skies, into pink granite outcroppings toward the blue-beyond.: Everywhere is that great wide horizon nourishing any artist's task of bringing the infinite into finite form. Especially today, as development suburbanizes open space, Little Compton's natural color qualities, terrain formations, and spaciousness remain unique and significant resources for the inspiration of artistic work.

Since Thomas Worthington Whitridge, whose famous *A Breezy Day on Sakonnet Point* was painted in the 1880's, the list of celebrated painters and sculptors who have lived or spent summers here is impressive indeed: Frederick and Reginald Marsh, Lloyd Goodrich, Molly Luce, Betty Burroughs Woodhouse, Sidney Burleigh, Audrey Buller Parsons, John Sloan, and Sue Walker, to name only a few.

A Sakonnet Art Association flourished in the area in recent years, particularly in the summers when it held community arts, crafts and antique shows in the Brownell House, sponsored art classes for both children and adults, and otherwise supported and encouraged the work of local artists. Interest in the Art Association declined in the mid-1980's; it was dissolved soon after water-color artist Mary Post's death, and nothing similar has come along to take its place. In 1991, however, a group of eight local painters formed a consortium called Sakonnet Painters Cooperative and has opened a small gallery on the Commons where their work can be continuously exhibited and marketed.

Although nothing formal yet binds together the community's professional artisans, Little Compton has from the beginning provided a hospitable and productive atmosphere for the artistic work of individual craftspeople of all kinds: Woodworkers, furniture makers, weavers, jewelry makers, potters and ceramicists, among others. The work of area photographers, both amateur and professional, has also received considerable attention in recent years, a likely outcome of the photographic exhibitions held each summer at the Brownell House in recent years.

The performing arts - professional and semi-professional theater groups as well as summer theaters and community theater organizations - have also been a recurrent, if not continuous, part of Little Compton's cultural scene over the years. And recently both music and dance have made new inroads here; there is for example, growing interest among several groups of Sakonnet-area music-lovers in sponsoring soloists and chamber music groups from around the region for occasional concerts.

With this kind of small-community artistic history, and the growth of its present-day audiences and patrons, Little Compton should consider providing both institutional recognition and economic support for its present-day artists and craftspeople. Establishing an Arts and Cultural Council might offer a way to accomplish this and, at the same time, embrace the broader and more diversified cultural elements that continue to shape the character of the community.

**Community Center Concept** - Through, and prior to, the comprehensive planning process, much interest had been expressed about the potential for uniting the community goals of historic preservation and establishing a community center. The 1990 telephone survey of Little Compton residents gave a clear indication of how most resident feel about this topic.

Over 70 percent considered it important for the town to provide a community center. Over 95 percent said it was important for the town to preserve historic areas and properties. And 76 percent believed that the town should review the exterior design of all new or renovated buildings on the Commons. The responses to these questions show a convergence of interest at the concept level between community center needs and historic preservation needs.

The current need for community meeting space is primarily carried by private organizations. More than 16 community groups currently use the facilities of the churches of Little Compton, 32 community groups currently use the Brownell House (not a public building), a number of groups use the school, and an increasing number now use the Town Hall and its "Legion Hall" adjunct. Demands for community meeting space far exceed available facilities and scheduling for additional uses of what is available is difficult indeed.

There is widespread town support for a professionally supervised meeting place for teenagers, who traditionally have had none except the churches and the school. After the 8th grade, most Little Compton young people leave town to attend a parochial or private school, or public high school in Middletown; they are spread out in many directions, and have no central location to bring them together in their home town, which is their own expressed desire. In recent years, volunteers organized a teen center which opened in July, 1990, and currently operates in the old Fish and Game Club. Little Compton residents have expressed overwhelming support for this effort by providing funding and other assistance.

The need for a gathering place for seniors is expressed demographically. An increase of approximately 36 percent is expected in the 65+ age group. With trends toward longer life expectancy, the town's older population is expected to continue to increase as a percentage of the total population. In a recent needs assessment effort, seniors reported a need for a senior center, but a priority need is transportation to reach it and other activities.

These needs may shortly be answered in a number of ways, including the ultimate reactivation and use of the historic Grange Hall on the Commons as a community center. At present,

citizens are discussing a great variety of programs which might be housed or administered there. The following list is indicative:

- An apprenticeship program, whereby adults in town can share professional expertise and information with young people;
- An "Arts and Cultural Council" (see below), whose programs could include:
  - Musical programs (both chamber and folk performances); rehearsal space and performance nights for local musicians.
  - Modest studio spaces for artists or craftspeople (or workshop space for teaching same);
  - Rehearsals and performances by local theater and play-reading groups;
  - A writing center, with workshops, classes, readings and a journal;
- A food co-op and farmer's market (both traditional Grange activities).
- An oral history project. (It is recommended that this endeavor should involve not only adults but also upper-level students from the Wilbur School in a community-wide project to collect and preserve, in audio-taped (or perhaps video or film) interviews, the rich recollections of the town's older citizens about its cultural and historic past. See below for further details).

The committee spearheading the Little Compton Community Center effort is currently engaged in a major building fund drive aimed at renovating both the interior and the exterior of the Grange hall to provide a home for just such programs and activities as these.

#### **5.8.f Cultural Resource Concerns**

The following were identified from factual findings in the preceding text and input from the Natural and Cultural Resources Committee as significant cultural resources issues:

1. **Balancing Natural and Cultural Resources** - Maintaining the existing balance between natural and cultural resources, in which they continue to complement and enhance one another, will continue to be a challenge. "The visual cogency of Little Compton's historic development and the town's magnificent physical setting have made the town increasingly desirable... (and) as a result, the demand for new construction mounts yearly, and the price of real estate similarly escalates. The pressure for increased

development will continue partially because of the heavy reliance this quiet, seaside town on the seasonal presence of part-time residents, both as taxpayers and *as* consumers."<sup>11</sup>

2. **Protective Measures** - The lack of local protective mechanisms for historical and archaeological resources continues to place these important elements of the town's character at risk. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places provides minimal protection to these properties.
  - a. **National Register Nominations** - There is the potential to provide additional protection to qualified historic resources through National Register nomination. These properties listed the Rhode Island Historic Preservation report require further investigation and documentation to determine their eligibility.<sup>12</sup> The ultimate objective should be to have all eligible properties listed, providing at least minimum protection for each site.
  - b. **Design Guidance Measures** - Much of Little Compton's charm lies in the design coherence of its architecture. This coherence can be upset by unsympathetic design or layout. Mechanisms to guide the siting and design of structures to be compatible with the landscape and surrounding properties are important to this element of the town's character.
  - c. **Land Use** - The location of historic properties within the spectacular setting that is Little Compton provides a landscape that is without equal in Rhode Island. Maintaining this rural seaside community character is a priority. Current zoning and subdivision regulations do not provide explicit protection for historic or archaeological resources.

The existing requirement of two-acre minimum residential lot sizes throughout most of the town may eventually encourage a land use pattern of sprawling subdivisions which consume large areas. Understanding that the basis for this requirement is grounded in water resource protection, and ultimately public health and welfare, it is not suggested that the town abandon the regulation. However, as recommended in the report "*Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*,"

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<sup>11</sup> *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> See *Historic and Architectural Resources of Little Compton, Rhode Island*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990. page 36.

the town should be sensitive to the concept of maintaining its existing village character in areas such as the Commons and Adamsville that lend themselves to compact and clustered development. Other parts of the town may also warrant consideration of lower densities than currently exist, and cluster housing is a concept the town may wish to explore.<sup>13</sup>

There is no provision for site plan review within the town's zoning ordinance. This limits the town's ability to require developers to consider architectural and landscape suitability as well as historical and archaeological resources. Subdivision regulations do not require any reference to the presence of historical or archaeological resources on or near the subject property, nor of the architectural or landscape features of adjoining property. The town may wish to amend the subdivision review process to require such notation, and if necessary, establish a subdivision review committee to oversee the protection of these values and resources.

**d. Historic Landscapes - Designed and Natural** - Unique designed landscapes, (eg. gardens, farmsteads, residences, estates etc.), have been identified throughout Little Compton by the RIHPC. These features make a special contribution to the town's sense of place and its position in history.

In the same way, features of the town's natural landscape also define its character and reveal its history. The town should consider identifying and protecting areas of special visual quality, areas, for example, that accommodate such rewarding natural elements as stone walls, hedgerows, indigenous vegetation, meadows and open space.

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<sup>13</sup> Cluster housing is defined as "a site planning technique that concentrates buildings in specific areas on the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, common open space and/or preservation of environmentally, historically, culturally, or other sensitive features and/or structures. The techniques used to concentrate buildings shall be specified in the ordinance and may include, but are not limited to, reduction in lot areas, setback requirements and/or bulk requirements with the resultant open land being devoted by deed restrictions for one (1) or more uses. Under cluster development there is no increase in the number of lots that would be permitted under conventional development except where ordinance provisions include incentive bonuses for certain types of conditions of development Excerpted from An Act Relating to Cities and Towns — Zoning Enabling Statute, amending Chapter 45-24 of the Rhode Island General Laws.



### 5.8.g Cultural Resource Issues, Goals and Recommendations

**1. Historic Resources** - Our historic structures serve as a guideline to the character of the town and as such their preservation should be encouraged. In the areas of town which were settled earliest, the buildings are relatively close together; in other areas they are more widely dispersed. As time goes by they change ownership and often the new occupants do not know their history. Sometimes structural changes are made that unknowingly violate the integrity of the building. Continuing educational programs as to the value of these structures should be part of the overall approach to cultural resource preservation.

**2. Arts and Culture** - Little Compton has been a home to professional artists of all kinds over the years - and remains so today.

The town's governing boards and private agencies, and the public at large, should remain cognizant of the powerful role which the town's open space plays in the working lives of the town's resident artists, of others who visit for short professional working periods, and on the community at large. This valuable cultural resource should, therefore, be routinely included in the town's land use planning activities.

The town should also consider ways to provide both institutional recognition and economic support to its present-day artists and craftspeople and, at the same time, embrace the broader and more diversified cultural elements that continue to shape the character of this community.

**3. Community Center** - The community needs a central gathering place where groups of all ages and interests can meet. The Brownell House, the Town Hall (and its Legion Hall adjunct) and the village churches are all used for meetings; but a larger, more versatile center is needed for large meetings and to relieve the pressure caused by competition for space now. The projected Grange Hall renovations are expected to answer that need shortly.

**4. Library** - The Brownell Library serves an important need now, but years of underfunding have put it in the position of being behind the needs of the community. Stack space is limited, the children's room is crowded and the cataloguing system could be updated. Computerizing the system would allow better coordination with the school library.

**5 . Oral History** - Much of the heritage of an ancient community like Little Compton is often developed informally, passed down by word-of-mouth from generation to generation, and at some point it is shaped into written font. Earlier phases of the heritage of this village have, in part at least, been amassed in this manner and ultimately woven into the written documents that record its history.

An attempt should be made by concerned citizens in the town to carry on this tradition with its unfolding present-day history. This could be done by establishing an official Little Compton oral history project to ensure that this kind of indigenous collective memory about our heritage is not lost to future generations.

**6 . Archaeological** - Early American artifacts may be disturbed or destroyed by indiscriminate earth movement. Care must be taken around even small "finds" in case there are more articles nearby. A number of small family burial plots are not recorded in town records and should not be allowed to disappear due to neglect.

**7 . Sakonnet Harbor** - **The** harbor is a visible tribute to the culture of the fishing community which has been such an integral part of Little Compton. It is summarized in the Natural Resources section of this Plan, but is well worth noting under the Cultural Resource Section as well. Full details of the harbor can be found in the recently updated Sakonnet Harbor Management Plan.

**8 . Rights-of-Way** - There are numerous rights-of-way in Little Compton that are part of the town's heritage. Little used and/or mapped rights-of-way are neglected and their locations are forgotten. In order that they are not lost, they should be delineated and preserved.

**9 . Stone Walls** - The adaptation of the land to agriculture is manifested dramatically by the stone walls lining most of our roads. Not only do they bear silent witness to the labors of the early settlers to move tons of stone so casually deposited by the glaciers to make the land tillable, but they are also a vital contributor to the character of the town. Well beloved by most residents and an outstanding attraction for visitors, they deserve to be preserved and rebuilt.

**10. Scenic Quality** - The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory published by RIDEM in 1990 noted most of Little Compton as having distinctive or unique natural landscapes of high scenic quality, e.g., areas of outstanding topographic and geologic features, areas

with a variety of natural or pastoral vegetation, lakes, ponds, rivers, wetlands which are pristine, untouched and unpolluted. Specifically noted were the "beautiful farms and homes" dotting the landscape. Such features contribute to the sense of place in Little Compton and its overall quality of life.

- 11. Special Places** - "Special places" are places which are most important to the character and quality of life in the Town. In some cases, these places are of ecological or historic importance, but often they are vulnerable to inadvertent change.<sup>14</sup>

### 5.8.h Cultural Resource Goals

1. **Historic Resources** - To identify landscapes, sites and buildings that assume an historic significance so that they can be preserved and protected.
2. **Arts and Culture** - To support artistic and cultural aspects of the town which play an important role in establishing the town's identity, including such elements as specific ethnic and interest groups, locations of historical and traditional importance within the community, and the creation and usage of places of formal and informal assembly.
3. **Community Center** - To establish additional community meeting places for young people, the elderly and other specific interest groups.
4. **Library** - To support expansion of the Brownell/Little Compton Public Library and the coordination of its operations with the Wilbor/McMahon School Library.
5. **Oral History** - To encourage recording of the oral history known to long-time residents so that the heritage represented in all ethnic, cultural and occupational groups may be preserved.
6. **Archaeological** - To identify and thereby help prevent the destruction of known and yet-to-be discovered archaeological sites, including the major community cemeteries and the many smaller family burial plots.
7. **Sakonnet Harbor** - To keep Sakonnet Harbor a viable location for the fishing industry and the recreational boating community.

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<sup>14</sup>*New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan, Discussion Draft, August 5, 1991, page 13.*

8. **Rights-of-Way** - To delineate and preserve the town's historic rights-of-way so that the heritage they represent is not lost.
9. **Stone Walls** - To preserve and restore the stone walls that line the town's roads and traverse our historic working landscapes.
10. **Scenic Quality** - To identify and protect the views and viewsheds of the historic working landscapes and seascapes which give Little Compton its unique scenic quality.
11. **Special Places** - To identify, preserve and protect from deliberate or inadvertent change the Town's special places; views and viewsheds, places of ecological and historic importance, and objects or places of character and meaning to the Town's residents.

#### **5.8.i Cultural Resource Recommendations**

(numbering continued from natural resources recommendations)

38. **Consider establishing a Little Compton Historical Preservation Advisory Board** which would address the Town's scenic character, historical sites and structures, architectural integrity and archaeological resources. More specifically, the Board would:
  - Consist of members who are representative both of the relevant local organizations (public and private) and of individuals with a knowledge of and interest in history, architecture, landscape design and archaeology;
  - Prepare an Historical Preservation Plan to identify the Town's resource protection needs, including residences, historic designed gardens and working landscapes, scenic areas, and townwide greenway linkages, among others.
  - Document local historic sites, structures and resources, and encourage property owners to nominate qualified properties to the State and National Registers of Historic Places;
  - Designate appropriately preserved historic sites and structures with descriptive site markers -- on a budget specifically allocated for such purposes;
  - Use educational, administrative and other mechanisms to guide construction or development where building permits are being considered in areas identified under the Preservation Plan;

- In the long term, consider establishing an Historical Preservation **Commission** as an out-growth of the Advisory Board -- to address more purposefully the historical design integrity within The Commons and Adamsville, and to move toward a complete listing of eligible historic structures, sites and districts on State and National Registers.

Little Compton residents appreciate and have taken steps individually to maintain its historic and landscape character -- but the Town must ensure that new as well as current residents of the community understand the importance of maintaining this character. Expanding the nature and frequency of educational and informational programs toward this end should be an integral part of the Town's overall approach to cultural resource preservation.

39. **Consider encouraging a Little Compton Arts and Cultural Council.** The Council would serve to develop and coordinate programs supporting the town's diversified artistic and cultural resources. Among its envisioned activities are:

- Arranging for community exhibitions, concerts and performances;
- Sponsoring classes and workshops;
- Providing scholarships for Little Compton students wishing to pursue careers in the arts.
- Encourage development of cottage industries in the arts and crafts fields.

It is proposed that this Council be set up initially under the aegis of the Village Improvement Society, with the ultimate goal of becoming a separate entity within the new Community Center as that institution becomes a reality.

40. **As private funding becomes available, complete renovation of Grange Hall** for use as a community center and assist the Little Compton Community Center Inc. in this goal, so that the Grange Hall can become the town's social, educational and cultural centerpiece.
41. **Expand the resources and the technical support of the Brownell/Little Compton Public Library** to a level that will enable it to expand its services, upgrade its equipment and improve its coordination with the Wilbor/McMahon School library.
42. **Establish, as soon as possible, a community Oral (and filmed) History Project** to seek out and interview long-time Sakonnet-area residents and record their

recollections of the town's recent history for a permanent archive--in the Brownell Library or Historical Association.

- Develop a major element of the program in cooperation with the Wilbor/McMahon School to encourage participation by upper grades students and their teachers as part of the language arts and social studies curriculum.
- Student involvement as researchers, interviewers and documentors would be based on the "cultural journalism" approach conducted successfully around the country for over 25 years by the Georgia-based Foxfire educational program.
- The Project could remain, administratively, with the schools; or ultimately could become a part of the Library program, or be included as a program of the Community Center when it becomes operational.

**43. Small private cemeteries** should be listed with the town (and State Historical Preservation Commission) and plotted on the Town's assessor's plats. An ordinance should be passed requiring builders, developers and excavators to notify the Town's Building Official if any Native American artifacts turn up during their operation. The Building Official should advise the homeowner/builder of this requirement.

**44. Study the Town's historic rights-of-way to preserve them on maps so that they are safeguarded during the development process when approvals are sought through the Planning Board and Building Official.**

**45. Preserve the fishing culture and recreational boating atmosphere at Sakonnet Harbor.**

**46. Provide incentives** via the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and consider tax relief to property owners to maintain their stone walls.

**47. Encourage and support the preservation of the Town's distinctive or unique natural landscapes of high scenic quality.**

- Prepare an inventory of special landscapes, with consideration given to scenic roads, villages, designed historic landscapes, outstanding views and vistas, farms and farmland, among others. Use the recent RIDEM and RIHPC reports (described previously) on scenic areas and landscapes as a starting point.<sup>15</sup>
- Develop a program for the protection of the identified landscape areas, including easements, zoning measures (overlays, site plan review, cluster option), subdivision regulations, public, landowner, and town official education.

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<sup>15</sup> Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, *Inventory of Historic Designed Landscapes in Rhode Island*, unpublished draft, obtained from MacKenzie Woodward, February, 1992. *The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory*, Rhode Island Dept. of Environmental Management, 1990.

- Reference recommendations in Natural Resources section of this element

**48. Encourage and support the preservation of the Town's special places.**

- Prepare an inventory of places which have meaning and significance for the Town's residents. Special places may be views and viewsheds of land, sea and farm, gathering places, may have ecological and historical significance, or may be special objects, i.e., a tree, a boulder, a stone wall etc.
- Develop a program for protection of identified special places, including easements, zoning measures (overlays, site plan review, cluster option), subdivision regulations, public, landowner and town official education.

## APPENDIX 5-B

- 18 Amesbury Lane: Case Farm (18th century)
- 64 Colebrook Road: Zebedee Manchester Homestead (ca. 1790)
- 178 John Dyer Road: Nathaniel Gifford House (18th century)
- 26 John Sisson Road: House (17th [?], 18th century, 1967)
- 500 Long Highway: John Sowle Farm (ca. 1850)
- 61 Maple Avenue: Wilbour-Brownell Farm (ca. 1827 [?], 19th century)
- 68 Maple Avenue: Lake-Pierce Farm, (ca. 1840)
- 89 Maple Avenue: Peckham-Brownell-Dyer Farm (late 19th/early 19th century [?])
- 90B Old Main Road: Almy Farm (late 18th century)
- 10 Old West Main Road: Amy Phillips House (1941-42)
- 16B Old West Main Road: Taylor-Simmons House (late 18th century)
- 79 Peckham Road: Pearce Farm (mid-18th century, later 18th/early 19th century, mid-19th century)
- 63 Peckham Road: Henry B. Simmons House (ca. 1850)
- 97 Round Pond Road: Abbott Phillips house (1926-27)
- 106 Sakonnet Point Road: Simmons-Manchester House (mid-19th century, ca. 1898)
- 122 Sakonnet Point Road: David Sisson House, the "Stone House" (ca. 1854)
- 5 Shaw Road: Pardon Brownell House (late 18th century)
- 100 Shaw Road: Briggs Farm (early/mid-18th century)
- 12 South of Commons Road: William Wilbour House (ca. 1850);
- 31 South of Commons Road: Seabury-Richmond-Burchard House (ca. 1840, mid-20th century)
- 35 South of Commons Road: "Seaborn Mary" House (ca. 1730, 1937)
- 59 South of Commons Road: Isaac Bailey Richmond House (ca. 1830, ca. 1890)
- 60 South of Commons Road: Malachi Grinnell House (mid-18th century, 1948)
- 23 Taylor's Lane South: Daniel Drake-Smith House (1928-29)
- 60 Treaty Rock Road: Treaty Rock



- 191 West Main Road "Red Feather Farm", the Almy Farm (18th century)
- 193 West Main Road: Barn (18th century)
- 228 West Main Road: John Hunt Farm (18th century)
- 234 West Main Road: Friends Meeting House (1815)
- 311 West Main Road: David White Farm (ca. 1840)
- 316 West Main Road: "Bumble Bee Farm," the Frenning House
- 411 West Main Road: Brownell Farm (1804)
- 420 West Main Road: "Old Acre," the Church-Burchard House (ca. 1841, 1890)
- 438 West Main Road: Simmons-Wood Planer House (18th century, early 19th century)
- 466 West Main Road: Church Farm (late 18th century)
- 2 Wilbour Woods: Wilbour Woods (1847, ca. 1890, 1937)