

**OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT**

**5.9.1 INTRODUCTION**

Included in this Plan Element is an inventory of prime conservation areas, open spaces, and areas of high scenic value which enhance and identify Foster's rural character. These areas are recommended to be included in the Farmland - Rural Conservation Overlay District, for although the majority of Foster is undeveloped, few properties are protected from the potentially adverse effects of development.

Inventories of the recreation areas/facilities and the results of a needs assessment also are presented. Although this analysis demonstrates a need for expanded or new playfields/major parks, a consensus has not been reached among Foster residents as to the desired facility type or need. The Town of Foster offers many recreational opportunities unique to rural communities. Therefore, there may not be a general need for major recreational facilities. Instead, open areas may be adequate to provide playfields for general use with any improvements undertaken by user groups following Town standards. There may be a need for a multipurpose recreational complex.

The Planning Board should formulate a plan guiding the acquisition of property in town for open space and recreational use. This plan should include input from the Foster Land Trust, The Foster Conservation Commission, and the Foster Recreation Committee to ensure that the efforts of all these boards are coordinated to the extent possible.

Community goals and policies for the protection of conservation areas and open spaces and for the provision of recreational opportunities are compiled. A program for their implementation is included in the Implementation Program Element.

**5.9.2 INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

Conservation Areas and Open Spaces

**Rare Species Habitat Areas -- R.I. Natural Heritage Program**

The following list of rare species habitat areas of particular interest within Foster was provided by the R.I. Natural Heritage Program.

- The area surrounding Hemlock Brook, primarily a well-developed, mixed hemlock - deciduous forest, provides critical habitat for several rare species of birds in Rhode Island. Threats include logging and development of adjacent uplands. Protection of this forest/wetlands system is strongly urged.
- The subterranean spring system throughout the Jerimoth Hill area supports rare herpetofauna; although the Nature Conservancy has initiated protection efforts through their program of private areas

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

registry, further development and diversion of water are still threats.

- Parker Woodland, owned by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, supports several rarities; the expansion of this preserve through the protection of adjacent parcels would enhance its viability by buffering outside disturbances as well as increasing the topographic, microclimatic and floristic diversity.
- The mixed deciduous woodland just west of Round Hill, interspersed with small intermittent streams and seeps, supports a variety of rare flora. Development of this area is the most prevalent threat.

### **Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Communities -- R.I. Natural Heritage Program**

The R.I. Natural Heritage Program has compiled a list, beginning on p. 139, of rare species and exemplary natural communities in Foster, with the location of occurrences noted.

### **Areas of High Scenic Value/Interest -- Foster Conservation Commission/Citizens Advisory Committee List**

In addition, the Foster Conservation Commission and members of the Citizens Advisory Committee have noted areas of high scenic value and interest which they have determined reinforce the identity of the Town. These areas include areas which may not have been experienced by DEM staff traveling the roads of the Town, but interior areas, which are known by local townspeople and property owners.

A partial list of areas is noted on page 118.

Fourteen areas in town were catalogued in the *Rhode Island Landscape Inventory* (1990) by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). These areas are considered to be distinctive or noteworthy on a statewide rating. For a composite list see Section 5.7.6 Historic and Scenic Resources.

### **Unique Natural Areas -- "Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan", Draft Report, January 1989**

Several unique natural areas within Foster were listed in the "Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan", Draft Report, January 1989, and are repeated below. Some of these areas also were included in the above listing.

- **Natural Boiling Spring:** A very large, active, undisturbed natural boiling spring. This one-acre aquatic site is a habitat area of unusual significance to a fauna community. Since the water apparently surfaces from underneath rather than from the side, as in most springs, the sand on the bottom turns over constantly as the water comes in. This entrance from below also tends to maintain the water temperature at an almost constant level all year round. As a result,

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

trout can be seen year round in springs of this kind. This spring is undisturbed by man in that no cement enclosures or wooden huts adorn the area. The spring is totally in its natural state and, unfortunately, is thus openly exposed to possible damage. This is one of Rhode Island's best natural springs and should be protected. Owner requests no publicity. Additional information can be obtained from the Audubon Society.

- **Honey Pot Swamp:** This large black spruce/sphagnum bog is about 30 acres in area. The thick sphagnum mat in the center of this area actually makes this a bog environment rather than a swamp, although swampy areas do surround the mat itself. The central sphagnum mat is the most interesting feature here, in that it supports a good growth of native black spruce trees. Some trees have reached considerable size and reproduction is good. Another unusual feature here is that pitch pine, normally a species found in dry, desert-like conditions, is thriving here also. The area is habitat for a great deal of wildlife. Trails are seen throughout much of the bog. Part of the western edge has been filled by one of the owners to make pastureland for cattle. This area should be protected.
- **Unusual Herbaceous Vegetation:** This 10-acre site consists of a young forest of mixed hardwoods. The forest floor is the site of an unusual variety of herbaceous plants not commonly found elsewhere in Rhode Island. Plants such as Hepatica and Perfoliate Bellwort are here along with many other species indicative of a rich vegetational habitat. A large number of boulders, undoubtedly of glacial origin, make walking in the area difficult and perhaps contribute to the environmental conditions that allow the growth of these unusual species. The trees are mostly of black and yellow Birch, Beech, Dogwood, etc.; trees usually found in mesic conditions. This area shows promise of developing into a prime biological community if left undisturbed for several years.
- **Natural Boiling Spring:** This one-acre site consists of a very large and quite active boiling spring. The water enters the spring from underneath, as opposed to entering from the side, as in most springs. The entrance of water from underneath keeps the bottom sand turning over continuously and also keeps the water at a year round temperature of approximately 50 degrees. This spring and another are two of the best boiling springs in the State, because of their size, their activity, and due to the fact that they have been left relatively undisturbed. This spring has another special oddity about it in other springs. When a stick is thrust into the sand and pulled out again, the sand "chirps" or "squeaks". No other spring does this. A spring such as this is very endangered and should be protected continually from possible vandalism. This is a separate spring from one listed on p. 139.)
- **Hemlock Swamp with Brook:** This 100-acre Hemlock Swamp also contains a very old stand of red pine. The area consists of an extensive stand of hemlock trees along both sides of Hemlock Brook. The area extends from Foster Center (which once was called Hemlock, after this area),

north along the brook for a considerable distance. The forest is quite dense in spots and a wide variety of herbaceous plants are found in this rich area. Although it is not far from residential areas and the Town Center, it still retains a remote and pristine nature. The area is known to have otter and other wildlife along the brook. Just to the east of the Hemlock Swamp, up the hill and in back of the cemetery, stands a plantation of red pine said to be the oldest stand in the State. Some of the specimens are of considerable size and show reproduction. This area as a whole is an important forest and wetland community.

- **Scenic Gravel Road (Isthmus Road):** This scenic gravel road traverses the ledge of a reservoir and offers scenic vistas of ledges and covers along the water. The road is one of the most attractive drives in the State, encompassing an area of about 500 acres. This road passes through forests on the Scituate Reservoir Watershed area and small coves, and inlets of the Westconnaug Reservoir can be seen from the road. High ledge outcrops also are present along the road and contribute to the aesthetic value of the area. An additional feature along this road is the localized growth of balsam fir seedlings. Several of these, uncommon for this area, were seen growing along the road. The area is noted for its wildlife. Mink and otter are plentiful here. The road should be kept as gravel for its entire length and minimum development should take place.
- **Gabbro Outcrop:** This five-acre site contains an unusual gabbro outcrop in the middle of an old field. It is a visually interesting phenomenon. The rock is decaying and weathering rapidly so that much of the material has been broken down into smaller pieces. The surrounding area supports interesting vegetation as well. Fringed gentian and other unusual plants grow in the vicinity. The whole area is open farming land and a dedicated effort should be made to protect its rural quality.
- **Indian Village:** This three-acre area is already State-owned property and is the site for a large Indian rock shelter under an immense glacial boulder. The boulder is one of the larger specimens within the State. Indian artifacts have been found here, indicating that the area was used as a camping site or shelter of some kind. It is already part of the Ponagansett Fishing Area and, thus, the whole area has historical features of which this shelter is one.
- **Shagbark Hickory Stand:** A 25-acre dense growth of shagbark hickory trees which are not that common in the State, grow here in a rather dense forest. Although not a pure stand, they are by far the dominant species. Some have reached considerable size. The stand is divided by a gravel road (Ponagansett Road), but both sides of the road which includes the forest, is on land owned by the Providence Water Supply Board; thus, the area is relatively safe.
- **Ostrich Fern Site:** This one-acre site possesses a stand of ostrich fern found in only three or four sites within Rhode Island.

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

- **Scenic Gravel Road:** Hemlock Road is an undeveloped and unpaved back road in Scituate and Foster, Rhode Island. The majority of the road is on land owned by the Providence Water Supply Board. It is quite scenic with portions passing coves and an inlet of the Barden Reservoir. The road should remain unpaved to keep its wild aspect. A unique species of rattlesnake plantain is found along this road, and is found in only one other site in Rhode Island.
- **Stand of Tulip Trees:** This 30-acre site contains a relatively pure stand of tulip trees. This area was once considered to be a very interesting site in a botanical sense. Several species of rare and unusual plants were reportedly found here. Apparently, much of this original vegetation no longer is found here. However, a section of this area does have a good healthy stand of tulip trees -- quite an extensive stand. Although not pure, it is the dominant species and covers quite a large area. It is the best stand of tulip trees within the State of Rhode Island and merits protection for future years.
- **Scenic Woodland Brook with Hemlocks:** This five-acre forest and portion of Paine Brook is a scenic, significant and unusual land/water interface with hemlocks. Paine Brook is a small tributary or feeder brook which eventually joins larger waters to empty into the Barden Reservoir. Paine Brook is situated north of Route 6. It is a very scenic section with hemlock and white pine bordering the stream.

### **Property "Protected" from Development**

Although the majority of land within Foster is at present undeveloped, and includes certain properties of valuable scenic and natural areas, few lots are "protected" from development:

- Town-owned land.
  - Parker Woodland (Audubon Society of Rhode Island property).
  - Moosup Valley Park (Town-owned Section 6(f) property, developed for recreational use with federal Land and Water Conservation funds).
  - Farm/Forest/Open Space Property (private property registered with the State and Town for preservation).
  - Shippee Pond and Ponagansett River Areas (State-owned).
  - Providence Water Supply Board property.
  - Foster Land Trust
1. Land acquired by Foster Land Trust - from Estate of Dr. Robert Spencer and other
  2. Nature Conservancy Land on Winsor Road obtained from The Hayfield Estate.

Following is a list of these lands and the plat and lot numbers of individual properties.

### **Municipal**

FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	40	Vacant Land
6	21	Vacant Land
7	50	Vacant Land
12	38	Vacant Land
20	10	Vacant Land
20	5	Town House Easement
20	5	Town House Field
20	8	Eddy House
1	45	Grange Hall
18	10	Fogarty School (Nike Site)
2	62	Woody Lowden Center

**Parker Woodland**

<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>	<u>Description</u>
3	21	Audubon Society of R.I.
3	26	Audubon Society of R.I.
3		Audubon Society of R.I.
3	67	Audubon Society of R.I.
11	04-B	Audubon Society of R.I.
17	94	Audubon Society of R.I.
4	72	Audubon Society of R.I.
3	20	Audubon Society of R.I.

**Farm/Forest/Open Space Property**

<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>
7	53-B
12	22
8	09
7	56
12	18
2	57
12	40-A
5	46

**Providence Water Supply Board**

<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>	<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>
6	16	12	39
6	21A	12	47
6	26	12	62
9	27	12	66
9	35	21	11
12	12		

# FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

## Providence Public Buildings Authority

<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>	<u>Plat</u>	<u>Lot</u>
6	14	6	14-03
6	33	6	14-D
6	14-E	6	14-I
12	42	12	41-A
12	42-A	15	49
15	52	18	31
15	50	21	31

### 5.9.3 Recreation Facilities and Areas

An inventory of the existing outdoor recreation facilities in Foster was included in the "Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan", Draft Report, January 1989 and updated during the preparation of this plan element. The Providence Water Supply Board property was included in the State inventory; however, it should not be designated as a passive recreation area since public access and use is prohibited. The inventory is organized in the following manner for planning purposes.

- By a developed scheme for planning districts, to aid in examining distribution of facilities;
- By jurisdiction (Town, State, Providence Water Supply Board, Private);
- Inventory/Description of each facility which are included in Technical Report #7, *Open Space and Recreation*.

The following tables show open space and recreation land in Foster by the following ownership: Town Facilities; State Facilities; and Private:

TABLE 10 - EXISTING TOWN FACILITIES BY PLANNING DISTRICT  
FOSTER, RI

<u>Planning Districts &amp; Facilities</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Town Total</u>
<b><u>Planning District A</u></b>			
Fogarty School	8	8	
<b><u>Planning District B (See Foster Recreation Map, after p. 131)</u></b>			
Moosup Valley (Town Park)	8		
Dunbars Field (Leased)	4.75	12.75	
<b><u>Planning District C (See Foster Recreation Map, after p. 131)</u></b>			

FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

Isaac Paine School	16	
Town House Field	5	
Woody Lowden Center	11	32

**Planning Districts A, B & C**

Ponaganset Regional	8	8	60.75
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TABLE 11 - STATE RECREATION FACILITIES BY PLANNING DISTRICT FOSTER, RI

Town	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total</u>
<b><u>Planning District A</u></b>			
Ponagansett Fishing Area	70		
Shippee Pond Access	3		
Jerimoth Hill Grove	2	75	
<b><u>Planning District B</u></b>	0		
<b><u>Planning District C</u></b>	0	75	

TABLE 12 - PRIVATE RECREATION AREAS BY PLANNING DISTRICT FOSTER, RI

	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Town Total</u>
<b><u>Planning District A</u></b>			
Cranston Fish & Game	100	100	
<b><u>Planning District B</u></b>			
Vasa Park Campgrounds	42		
Dyer Woods Nudist Camp	200		
Ginny "B" Campgrounds	115		
Foster Country Club	180		
Rifle Club (Part)	40		
Pine Tree Gun Club	<u>22</u>	599	
<b><u>Planning District C</u></b>			
Parker Woodland (Audubon)	200		



# FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

Brown Snowmobile	105		
Whippoorwill Campground	35		
Highland Rod & Gun	62		
Rifle Club (Part)	<u>87</u>	489	1,188

Town, State and Private Recreation areas include a total of 1,323.75 acres.

The inventory shows that Town-owned recreational facilities, including Ponagansett Regional School, total 60.75 acres; State recreational facilities total 75 acres; and 1,008 acres are privately owned facilities. (Providence Water Supply Board property was not included in these totals.)

Quantitative standards to assess recreational needs of communities were proposed and adopted by the RI Recreation Resource Review Committee (June 1989 Standards for Local Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plans).

A history of the population (1960 - 1988) distribution by planning districts indicates a relatively even distribution of growth. Recreational opportunities indicate a relatively even distribution of growth. Based on the standards of 3.75 acres/1,000 population for playgrounds and minor parks and 6.25 acres/1,000 population for playfields and major parks, Town-wide need is estimated as follows:

TABLE 13 - Foster Future Recreational Needs - 1995 - 2000  
**Town-Owned Land**

Year	Population	<u>Playground/Minor Parks</u>			<u>Playfield/Major Parks</u>		
		<u>Existing</u>	<u>Need</u>	<u>Dif</u>	<u>Existing</u>	<u>Need</u>	<u>Dif</u>
1995	4,693	19.0	17.6	+1.4	10.0	29.3	-19.3
2000	5,164	19.0	19.4	-.4	10.0	32.3	-22.3

With effective development there could be an excess of playgrounds and minor parks with no new acquisition necessary. However, playfields and major park category demonstrates a need for expansion of existing facilities or acquisition.

## North - South Trail

The 1989 Draft Report of the "Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Plan" provided the following information about the RIDEM proposed North - South Trail from the "North - South Trail Feasibility Study", Department of Environmental Management, Office of Planning and Development.

The Department of Environmental Management has studied and proposed a continuous and comprehensive trail system from Buck Hill Management Area in Burrillville to the abandoned Navy Land in Charlestown.

This proposed trail system would offer a 12-month recreational opportunity for the "entire family" for hiking, camping, horseback

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

riding, bird watching, sightseeing, and conservation study. In addition, such winter pursuits as cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, and snowmobiling would be possible under controlled circumstances. Access for hunting and fishing would also be a possibility. Paramount in this effort is protection of the surrounding environment.

An object in developing a North - South Trail is to utilize **at least seven (7) of the State-owned recreational areas in the western part of the State**; other alternatives such as minimum maintenance and abandoned or unused Town roads may be used.

The newly adopted Rhode Island Landowner Liability Law limits the liability of landowners who permit their land to be used for recreational purposes. Systematic interconnection of a trail system can be effectively facilitated by three important resource tools:

- State-owned land;
- Minimum maintenance and abandoned, unused, or little used, Town roads; and
- Private land areas.

The entire **North/South Trail** in Rhode Island would comprise about 65 miles. The information regarding the specific routes within Foster under consideration for the three alternative trails is contained in Technical Report # 7, *Open Space and Recreation*.

### 5.9.4 Recreational Programs

Foster provides a variety of recreational programs throughout the year. These programs include the Summer Recreation Program that runs July-August. This program offers; Arts, crafts, sports, & games daily; also weekly field trips and theme parties.

There are many events during the year for the whole family. These events usually correlate to a Holiday. Some of the events offered are as follows:

- **Ghoulish Graveyard and Halloween Dance** - for the entire family.
- **Easter in the Valley** - which is free for all families and residents.
- **Summer Concert Series Summer** - a free concert series at the Town Grounds for residents to enjoy.
- **BINGO** - on the last Friday of the Month. Families and residents are welcome to play.
- **Foster Family Fun Day** - held near the end of the summer, includes games, rides, arts and crafts, music, refreshments and fireworks.
- **Turkey Shoot** - held the week before Thanksgiving weekend.
- **Foster Old Home Days** - held the last full weekend in July.
- **Swamp Meadow Community Theatre** - Two plays per year.

All these events are sponsored by the Foster Recreation Committee and other organizations including the fosteringarts.org, Foster Center and Tyler Free Libraries, the Old Home Days Committee, and the Paine School P.T.G.

**Sporting Activities include:** Soccer, T-ball, Little League, Basketball and

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

Volley Ball. These are all sponsored by the Town through the Foster Recreation Committee.

The Woody Lowden Center - contains basketball courts, a baseball field, running track, football/soccer field, and a building for indoor activities.

The Paine School grounds offers a playground, walking trails and indoor Volleyball.

Other activities/group events offered in Town by outside organizations include:

- Boy Scout Troop 101
- Cub Scout Pack 101
- Girl Scouts and Brownies
- FFA membership and activities are available through the Regional School
- 4-H Club held in the Grange building at Moosup Valley
- Young at Heart program for all ages and not restricted to Foster Residents.

Trips to different events and sites provided by the Recreation Committee are open to all Foster residents. Some of the trips provided in 2005 were:

**Boston Museum of Science**

**Boston Aquarium**

**Mystery Dinner Theater**

**Holiday Concerts at the Newport Mansions**

### 5.9.5 APPROACH

Areas of high scenic value and environmentally sensitive/valuable wildlife habitats have been identified and included in the proposed Farmland - Rural Conservation Overlay District Map. This district encompasses areas and features of prime conservation concern to Foster in achieving the Town's planning goals to preserve the rural character and natural environment; maintain identity of historic village centers and small farmsteads; and to preserve farmlands and unobstructed views over fields and woodlands. The unique areas contained in lists included in this plan element are located within the Farmland - Rural Conservation Overlay District.

#### **Farmland - Rural Conservation Overlay District**

- Natural Habitats, Wetlands, Hydric Soils, Outwash, Severe Environmental Constraints
- Open Fields, Farms, and Farmlands
- Prime and Important Agricultural Soils
- Historic and Scenic Resources

Recreational facilities, both active and passive, will be developed in character with a rural, self-sufficient life style and the wealth of natural resources available in Foster for *private* and *public* recreational

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

uses.

The following are community goals and generated policy statements for their implementation regarding open space preservation, and the provision of passive recreation opportunities and active recreation facilities.

### GOALS

- Assure that the unique recreational, environmental and cultural resources of the Town, including the historic resources, landscape and scenic features, rivers, lakes, ponds, groundwater resources, agricultural soils, community facilities and open spaces are protected from the potential adverse effects of future growth and development and that these resources continue to enhance the quality of life in Foster for residents and visitors alike.

### POLICIES

- Locate all unique areas of conservation concern, including unique habitats and formations, and scenic areas in the proposed Farmland-Rural Conservation Overlay District.
- Develop a list of priority areas critical for preservation with direct assistance from the Conservation Commission and the recently established Land Trust. Areas designated or listed in the Comprehensive Plan should form the base for this inventory.
- Examine protecting lands or portions of properties from the adverse effects of development through use of the following:
  - Acquisition of full ownership rights;
  - Acquisition of rights less than full ownership - scenic easements; access easements for hiking, horseback riding, fishing, skiing, etc.; and conservation easements to protect wetlands, streams and water bodies;
  - Regulatory Devices: Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to permit cluster developments where advisable and commensurate land saved as common open space. This process was begun in the Residential Compound zoning.
- Adopt Farmland-Rural Conservation Overlay Zoning District with associated development performance standards;
- Assessment and tax policies to encourage conservation of open space lands and unique areas;
- Land Trust activities to save and manage open space through donation and other acquisition;
- Gifts to the Town, Audubon Society, and Nature Conservancy;

## FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

- Complying with the Scituate Reservoir Management Plan;
- Establishing land use controls based on the limitations of each area, including zoning, performance or design standards;

Specific to land along the proposed North/South Trail including the northwestern section of Town:

- Develop conservation corridors or designated preserves in areas identified as "very high" constraints along the Ponagansett and Moosup Rivers.
  - Monitor the quality of water bodies.
- Establish a progressive policy toward open space conservation as a positive element in the Town's economic development and growth.
- Establish a Capital Improvement Program to efficiently allocate funds for orderly acquisition of open space resources in a manner to take advantage of Federal and State matching funds or other programs.
- Cooperate with neighboring communities including Glocester, Killingly, Sterling, Coventry and Scituate and States of Connecticut and Rhode Island for the identification and joint investigation of open space opportunities and, where appropriate, provide for the utilization of the resources as joint ventures.
- Preserve conservation and open space areas for passive recreational use. Provide public access to certain areas while protecting sensitive resources located on the properties.
- Maintain coordination between the School and Recreation Departments in the maintenance and expansion of existing facilities, and in the acquisition and development of new facilities.
- Establish a proper balance between outdoor and indoor recreation facilities for all residents.
- Establish a Capital Improvement Program to efficiently allocate funds for orderly acquisition and development of recreation facilities and in a manner to take advantage of any Federal and State matching programs.
- Cooperate with neighboring communities including Glocester, Killingly, Sterling, Coventry and Scituate, and States of Connecticut and Rhode Island for the identification and joint investigation of recreation opportunities and, where appropriate, provide for the utilization of the resources as joint ventures.
- Determine the need for more centrally located and evenly distributed new, developed active play areas, courts and playfields - basketball, football, baseball, softball, little league, soccer and tennis by

FOSTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2003 UPDATE

recruiting input from users of these facilities.

- Examine if existing recreational sites owned by the Town can be expanded. Utilize recreational clubs and other organized users, with Town support, as a resource to pay for improvements and maintenance of these recreational areas provided that standards are in place for the development of these recreational areas.