

### **SECTION III. ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WILDLIFE RECOMMENDATIONS**

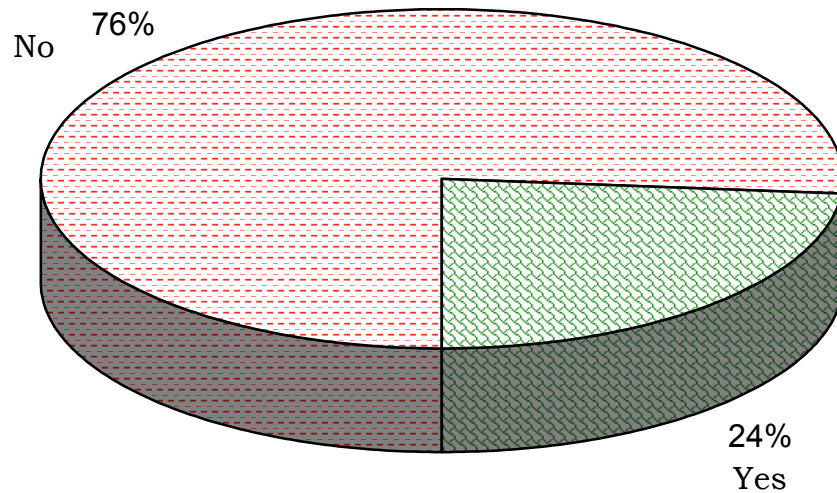
The amount and quality of information in an Open Space and Recreation Plan is irrelevant if it is not considered within the contexts of local vision and values, and if it is not fully incorporated in the planning process. The Goals and Objectives, and Five-Year Action Plan sections of Open Space and Recreation Plans are where inventory information is translated into a prioritized set of objectives. For Open Space and Recreation Plans to effectively conserve wildlife and their habitats, Plans must include wildlife-related action items in their Five-Year Action Plans. Our final assessment considers whether Plans address and include wildlife and wildlife habitat in their Five-Year Action Plans. Fish, including shellfish, are also included in this assessment.

We reviewed 34 Open Space and Recreation Plans from communities in southeastern Massachusetts to assess how well they integrated vegetation and wildlife inventory information into their Five-Year Action Plan. We did so by asking if each Plan does the following:

1. Call for the enhancement of wildlife habitat?
2. Identify and restrict activities that negatively impact wildlife/wildlife habitat?
3. Identify wildlife as a priority consideration in the acquisition/management of open space?
4. Recommend identifying or surveying lands with important wildlife habitat?
5. Address hunting/fishing policy on municipal lands?
6. Consider wildlife corridors?

For questions 1-5, information in Plans was categorized as either a “Yes” or “No” response. Assessment of Question 6 required the addition of a third category of response. Responses were then totaled for all Plans examined. Results and discussion of these analyses follow, by question.

### Question 1. Does the Plan call for enhancement of wildlife habitat?



#### Overview of Information

Setting aside open space does not ensure the maintenance of its ecological value. Municipal open space often requires active stewardship to retain or enhance its value to wildlife. This question was intended to identify how frequently activities to enhance wildlife habitat were included among Plans' goals and action items. Plans that explicitly identify activities intended to improve wildlife habitat were categorized as a "Yes" response. Towns that include activities to enhance wildlife habitat in their Plans consider it a priority, and have assumed responsibility for the conservation of wildlife habitat.

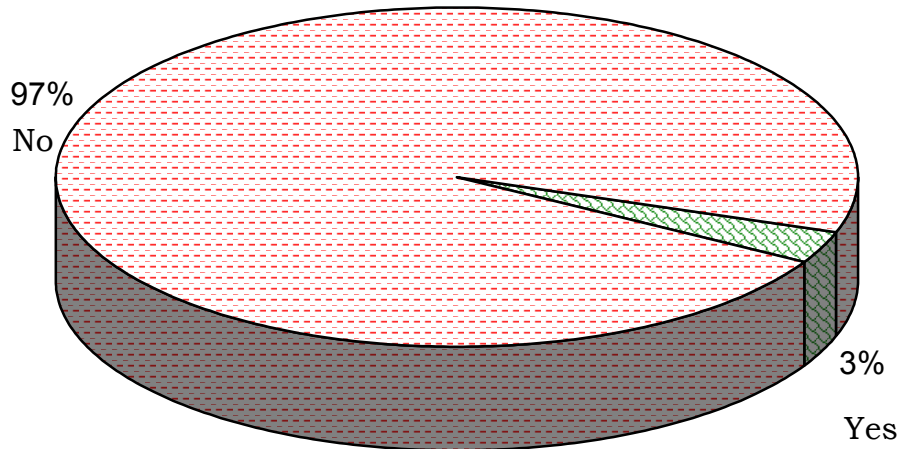
Relatively few Open Space and Recreation Plans identify actions to enhance wildlife habitat. Of these, the majority address enhancements to fish habitat. Removing dams, regulating water levels, improving fish ladders, restoring wetlands, and improving water quality for fish and shellfish were all identified. Coastal communities, such as Cohasset,

Mattapoisett, New Bedford, Sandwich, and Westport, typically consider these action items. One interior community, North Attleboro, also identifies the enhancement of water quality as a way to enhance wildlife habitat. Enhancement of terrestrial wildlife habitat is less common. The Town of Cohasset's Plan identifies several innovative activities, including the creation of a wildflower meadow atop a capped landfill, controlling invasive plants, and creating vernal pools. Kingston's action items include construction of a wildlife corridor beneath a state highway expansion project.

#### Recommendations

Activities intended to enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat should be included in every Plan. Local enhancement activities should incorporate detailed information on your town's wildlife and their habitat needs into an achievable action item. Consideration should be given to low-cost enhancement activities that use volunteer labor, as they are most likely to be achieved.

**Question 2. Does the Plan identify and restrict activities that negatively impact wildlife/wildlife habitat?**



**Overview of Information**

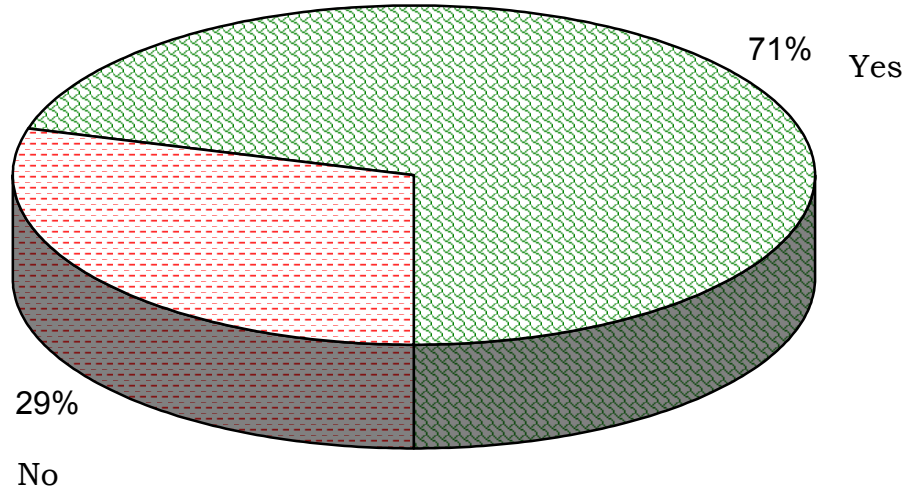
Any statement that addresses the regulation of any activity that may directly or indirectly harm wildlife or their habitat was categorized as a “Yes” response.

Only one Plan, the Town of Dartmouth’s, included restrictions on activities harmful to wildlife and/or their habitats. The placing of regulatory controls in rare species habitats was an action item to help the Town achieve its objective of providing “extra protection to some of the Town’s most fragile natural resources.” The lack of similar restrictions in other Plans could suggest that all other communities already have adequate policies for regulating activities on municipal open space. However, these communities did not include such regulations in their Plans, nor did they indicate if such regulations exist.

**Recommendations**

Each Town should have a comprehensive set of regulations that identify which activities are permissible, and which are restricted, on municipal open space. These regulations should include restrictions that minimize or eliminate negative impacts to wildlife and their habitat. We strongly recommend that towns include these regulations in their Open Space and Recreation Plans. Towns lacking comprehensive regulations on the use of municipal open space should develop, or formalize, such regulations. Towns with out of date regulations should revise them. The development or revision of regulations should be considered for inclusion in your Plan’s action items.

**Question 3. Does the Plan identify wildlife as a primary consideration in the acquisition/management of open space?**



**Overview of Information**

Most Plans identify the protection of wildlife habitat as a main reason for land acquisition. However, Plans rarely consider specific benefits to particular species as a result of land acquisition. Plans that identify a species, group of species, habitat, or the general protection of wildlife were categorized as a “Yes” response.

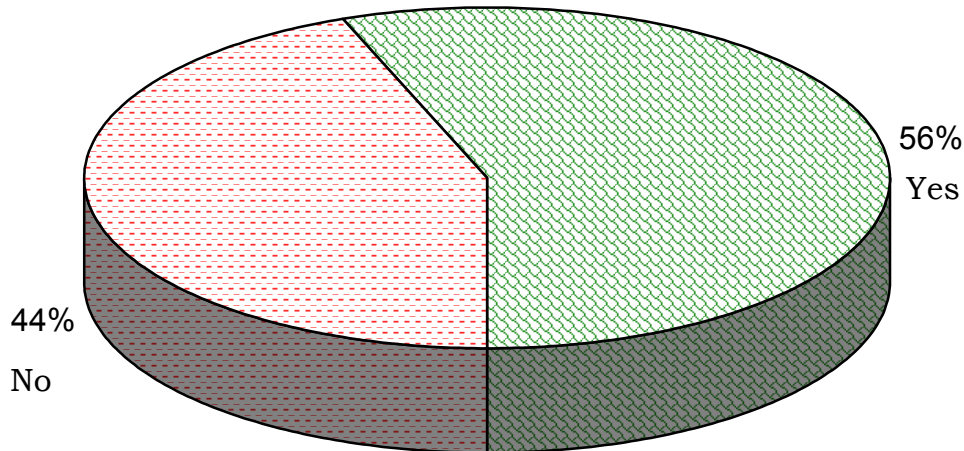
Stated objectives of land acquisition typically include protection of “significant wildlife habitat” or “lands important to wildlife.” How such habitats are to be identified is seldom discussed. An exception to this may be found in the Town of Norton’s Plan. The Plan states an objective to “Support natural resource protection in the Canoe River Aquifer Watershed Area” and proposes to achieve this objective by protecting “significant wildlife habitats, particularly those areas identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as containing threatened wildlife or rare plant communities through acquisition or development limitations.” In this example, Norton has used information from the NH&ESP to direct local acquisition.

There were few examples of specific management goals or actions for the benefit of wildlife. Most Plans did not address what happens to a parcel of property after acquisition. Cohasset’s Plan provides an excellent example of how some Plans address open space management for wildlife. One of Cohasset’s objectives is to “Protect natural environment including wildlife habitats and wetlands”; the action item to achieve this objective is to “identify/evaluate rare species habitats (including Elms Meadow) and develop appropriate management/protection plans.” This Plan acknowledges the need for ongoing management of wildlife habitat, and states how these needs will be identified and addressed.

**Recommendations**

Plans should acknowledge that protection of wildlife habitat requires both acquisition and ongoing stewardship. Further, they should also indicate how wildlife habitats to be protected are to be identified. If this information is not currently available, obtaining this information should be included as an action item. Finally, although stated objectives should be broad, action items to achieve these objectives should be specific.

**Question 4. Does the Plan recommend identifying or surveying lands with important wildlife habitat?**



**Overview of Information**

For a Plan to effectively conserve wildlife it must identify those species that occur in town, their habitat needs, and the ability of specific parcels of land to meet these needs. Because this information is unavailable for most communities, surveys are needed to identify parcels of land of high value to wildlife. Plans that address the need for surveys to identify lands of high value to wildlife were categorized as a “Yes” response.

Slightly more than one-half of Plans recommend identifying or surveying important wildlife habitat. However, most of these Plans indicate the need for additional information on areas already identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (i.e., Priority Habitats of Rare Species or Estimated Habitats of Rare and Endangered Species) rather than inventory unexamined parcels. One Plan, the Town of Cohasset’s, includes “Organize volunteer inventory projects to identify and monitor the status, habitat, and distribution of key species such as vernal pool organisms, swamp dock, spotted turtles, and forest-interior birds” among its action items. This is a rare example of a Plan recommending

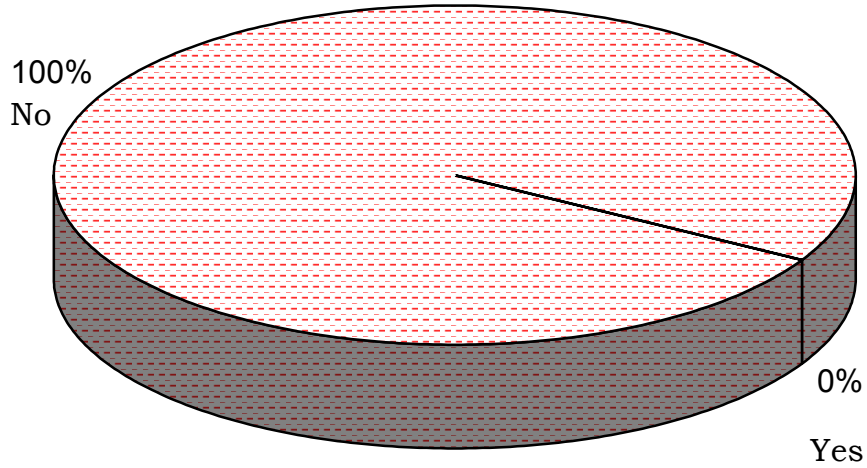
inventorying and monitoring of wildlife at the local level.

**Recommendations**

Our assessment of information on wildlife and their habitats (Section I, this report) identifies a need for improvement in the amount and quality of information in Open Space and Recreation Plans. Such information is necessary to reach sound conservation decisions. Each town should review the Environmental Inventory and Analysis portion (Section 4) of its Open Space and Recreation Plan, identify data gaps, and develop objectives and action items to fill those gaps. Youth groups, Biodiversity Days information, surveys by volunteers, and contract services may all help fill these gaps.

At present, towns do not view the collection of data and preparation of Plans as a cyclical process. Such an approach would emphasize the ongoing nature of open space planning, rather than the misconception that the open space planning process ends with the Division of Conservation Services’ approval of the current Plan. Five-Year Action Plans should include activities designed to collect data needed for future Plans.

### Question 5. Does the Plan address hunting/fishing policies on municipal open space?



#### Overview of Information

Consumptive uses of wildlife (i.e., hunting, fishing, and shellfishing) are among the oldest and most traditional. They are also among the most regulated, often requiring local (e.g., shellfish), State (e.g., hunting), and Federal (e.g., duck stamps) licenses. Consumptive uses, especially hunting, also elicit the strongest response from the public. For example, recent deer hunting seasons, or proposed seasons, in Duxbury, Middleborough, and Walpole polarized public opinion on the use of municipal wildlife resources and open space. This question was intended to identify if, and how, Plans address hunting, fishing, or shellfishing. A simple statement of one or more local policies regarding hunting, fishing, and shellfishing was categorized as a “Yes” response. The absence of information, or the mentioning of hunting, fishing, or shellfishing without mentioning regulations resulted in a categorization of “No.”

None (0%) of the Plans reviewed mention municipal hunting, fishing, or shellfishing policies in their Goals and Objectives or Five-Year Action Plan sections. The absence of such information

from these sections of Open Space and Recreation Plans may simply reflect that towns have long-established policies regarding hunting, fishing, and shellfishing, and as such, they are not considered priorities or identified as objectives or action items.

To determine if policies were identified elsewhere in Plans we conducted an additional review of the Vegetation and Fisheries and Wildlife portions of the Environmental Inventory and Analyses section. The Vegetation section is where Open Space and Recreation Plan requirements (Division of Conservation Services 2001) direct Open Space Committees to discuss hunting. The Fisheries and Wildlife section is intuitively where hunting and fishing may be addressed. Only 9% of Plans mentioned municipal wildlife and 24% mentioned fishing policies in their Environmental Inventory and Analyses section. No Plan contains a complete set of regulations for either. Those Plans that do address hunting policies tend to reference one or more locations where hunting is permitted. Plans that address fishing policies tend to reference an individual restriction, typically

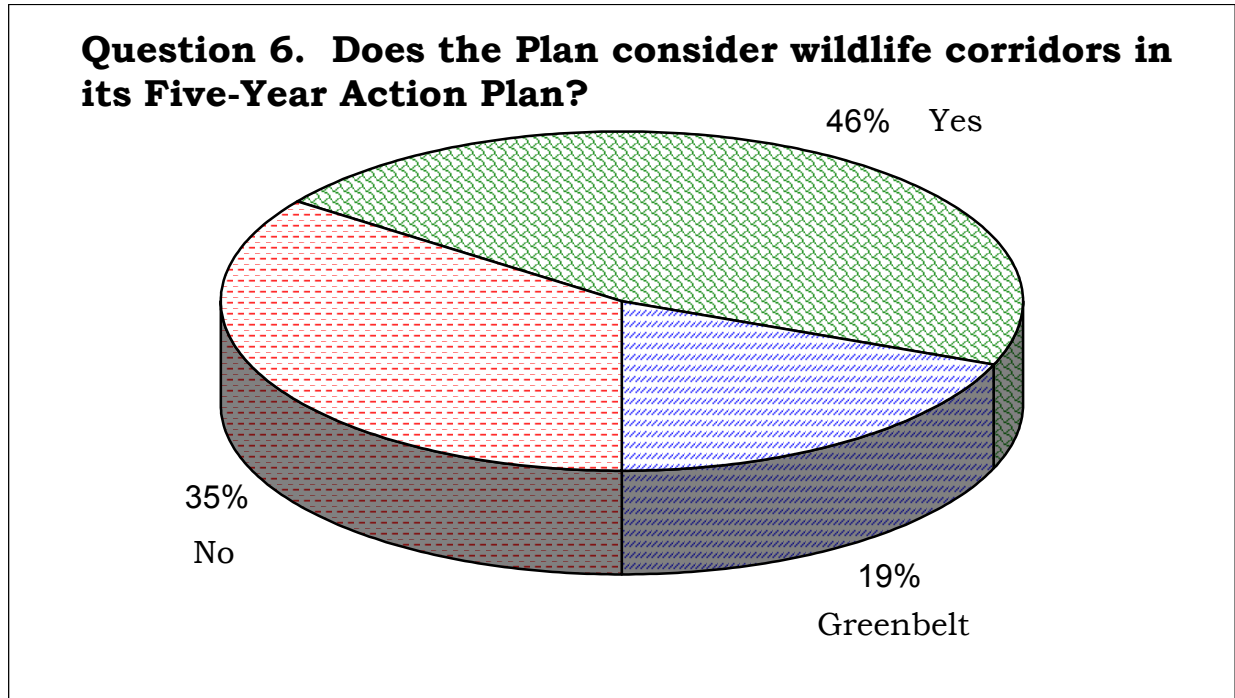
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on the harvest of shellfish or anadromous fish.

#### **Recommendations**

Plans should explicitly list all regulations that apply to hunting or fishing on municipal lands or in municipal waters. These regulations should be included as an appendix and referenced in the fisheries and wildlife portion of the Environmental Inventory and Analysis section. Contact information for a municipal official who can provide up to date information should also

be included in the event that regulations may change during the lifetime of the Plan, such as in response to special hunts or the closure of fishing areas. This information should also be provided to the Town Clerk, who currently has the responsibility of selling sporting licenses and distributing abstracts of the State's hunting and fishing regulations. If a detailed set of regulations does not exist, the development of these regulations should be included as an action item in the current Plan.



### Overview of Information

Unlike responses to other questions regarding Five-Year Action Plans, there are three types of responses to this question. Plans that mention corridors, no matter how briefly, were categorized as a “Yes” response. Several Plans do not mention corridors among their goals, objectives, or action items; but do mention multi-use greenbelts. Typically, these greenbelts are primarily for active recreation (e.g., running, bicycling) but a value to wildlife is either stated or implied. Plans that identify such greenbelts were categorized as “Greenbelt.” Those that mention neither corridors nor greenbelts were categorized as a “No” response.

Only 46% of Plans include some action related to corridors in their goals and objectives or action items. In contrast, the number of Plans that address wildlife corridors (Section II, Question 4, this report) is 59%. Approximately one-third (35%) of Plans make no mention of either corridors or greenbelts. The remaining Plans (19%) mention greenbelts but not corridors.

It appears that some towns consider greenbelts an economical way to provide for

active recreation and ecological connectivity. However, bike and running paths rarely provide enough natural area to function as a wildlife corridor. In addition, the level of recreational activity on such paths may be incompatible with use by wildlife. Towns considering greenbelts as a way to meet both recreation and wildlife needs must consider if the greenbelt will be large enough to provide for unimpeded movement by wildlife distant enough from recreation to avoid disturbance. If not, the greenbelt will likely be used by a limited number of species and provide few of the functions described by Forman (1995).

### Recommendations

Functional corridors are critical to the long-term survival of the region’s wildlife. With few exceptions, all Plans should include corridors among their goals, plans, or objectives. The only exceptions to this are those towns with an intact natural landscape that do not need corridors (i.e., Westport, as self-identified in their Plan), or those town with established, ecologically functioning corridors among all patches of wildlife habitat. Every other town should include some aspect of corridors (e.g., identification, acquisition, management, monitoring) in its Five-Year Action Plan.