

Local Conservation in Action

Natural Resource Maps and Recommendations for Project Review

Town of Rhinebeck Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)

In this Dutchess County town, the CAC developed a Geographic Information System (GIS) to **provide natural resource information to the Planning Board** for all new development proposals. The GIS includes publicly available information about soil, slopes, habitats, floodplains, wetlands, etc. When a new development proposal is referred to the CAC, the members focus the templates on the parcel under review and prepare site-specific maps for the Planning Board.

In addition to the maps, the CAC created a database of **habitat-based conservation recommendations**. For each development project before the planning board, the Rhinebeck CAC assembles a set of development guidelines based on the types and configuration of habitats shown on the natural resource maps they've created. These science-based conservation recommendations are from publicly available sources, such as reports from Hudsonia's Biodiversity Resource Center. The maps and recommendations satisfy the CAC's desire to add objective and credible information to the land use review process. In one instance, the CAC maps alerted the Planning Board of an area protected by the town's wetland watershed zoning provisions and changes were made to the project design. The Planning Board now relies on the CAC for this analysis, and provides it to applicants to streamline the review process by getting everyone on the same page.

Natural Resource Inventory

Town of Rosendale Commission for the Conservation of the Environment

In Ulster County, the Town of Rosendale's Commission for the Conservation of the Environment has completed an **in-depth assessment of the town's natural resources**, which was adopted by the Town Board in January 2011. The Natural Resource Inventory will help the Commission give informed recommendations to the Planning Board about future land use. The Commission was able to use the diverse strengths of their members to pull together existing resources from many different projects and organizations, such as groundwater data, watershed boundaries and information on biological communities. The Commission was also able to create many new natural resource data sets to fill in gaps, including historic sites and privately protected lands. Each section of the inventory includes text about the importance of the information, how it can be used for land use planning and review, its limitations and references for more information.

The Commission will also create a series of **digital, layered PDF documents** making the inventory more accessible and easy to use by Planning Board and community members.



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Building Strong Relationships between Boards

Town of Berne Conservation Board and Planning Board

The Berne Environmental Commission became a conservation board several decades ago when they **completed a Natural Resource Inventory** for this rural hilltown in western Albany County. Over the years, the interaction between the Berne Conservation Board and Planning Board has had many positive effects on the town's biodiversity. The Conservation and Planning boards, along with the Town Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, have **regular, joint meetings** where new projects and concerns are discussed. Members of the Conservation and Planning boards **identified and mapped 3500 acres of habitat** as part of a training program with Hudsonia Ltd. and the Hudson River Estuary Program. The board members worked together to include the habitat map and report in a 2011 **Comprehensive Plan update**.

To support project review, the Conservation Board **conducts site visits and prepares a written report** of findings that they present to the Planning Board. On one site visit at a 4-lot subdivision, the Conservation Board documented previously unknown swamp and spring habitats. The Planning Board negotiated with the applicant to avoid the wetland habitats preserving the biodiversity values and the ecosystem services of water filtration and flood mitigation provided by those intact habitats. The Conservation Board's well-defined relationship with the Planning Board leads to valuable input and new insights in the land use review process.

Habitat Assessment Guidelines for Project Review

Town of Milan Conservation Advisory Council and Planning Board

The CAC and Planning Board in the Town of Milan, Dutchess County created a set of **habitat assessment guidelines** for applicants proposing land development projects. Habitat assessments prepared voluntarily by applicants have become a standard tool in the review process, addressing environmental concerns at the earliest stages of project development. The guidelines benefit applicants by streamlining and clarifying the environmental information necessary for a complete review by the Planning Board. The process also benefits town residents by helping to **protect the town's biodiversity and rural character, and maintain ecosystem services**.

The assessments help the Planning Board gain a fuller understanding of a site's resources in the context of the surrounding landscape. The guidelines standardize how to collect and document information. **By gathering data about existing habitats and species of conservation concern before the sketch plan approval, applicants help minimize delays and expenses due to project review.** In one case, the habitat assessment of a 4-lot subdivision with steep slopes and a wetland provided science-based support for the final conservation subdivision, which protected 45% of the parcel under conservation easement. At least four other Hudson Valley towns have adopted similar habitat assessment guidelines. Milan's guidelines are a good example of this increasingly common tool.



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The NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program
Helping people enjoy, protect, and revitalize the Hudson River Estuary and its Valley
www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4920.html