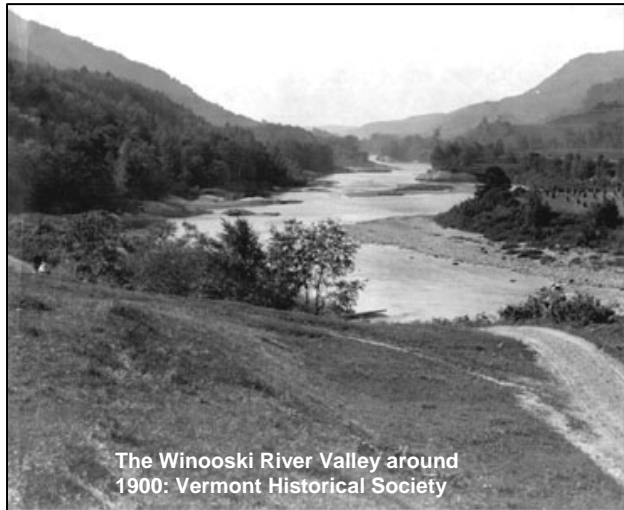


Chapter 6: Natural Resources

This section covers the mountains, waters, forests, fields, plants, and animals that comprise the physical character of Middlesex. The health of the Town's natural resources is important, as is their pivotal role in the land-use occupations they support, the outdoor recreation they provide, and the opportunities for learning about our natural world so close to home.

Forests and Fields

The combination of forests and fields are a significant element in determining the "rural character" of Middlesex. The views of these open spaces to a large extent define the character of rural living. The forests are used by many residents for logging, as well as hunting, hiking, skiing, and other recreational pursuits. Most of the land is privately owned. The Putnam State Forest runs along the western boundary of the town, part way up the slope of the Worcester Range. There are approximately 40 privately owned parcels in Town currently enrolled in the "Current Use Program", which provides tax relief to landowners who keep their land in forestry or agricultural uses.



Middlesex has significant large forested areas, currently undeveloped, which are interrupted only by the occasional logging road or trail. An attached map shows those areas of town that are considered "Significant Forests" (a minimum of 500 acres of undeveloped forests) as defined by the VT Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation.

Streams, Rivers, Ponds, Wetlands, and Groundwater

The streams of Middlesex flow either east to the North Branch of the Winooski River and Wrightsville Reservoir, or south to the main branch of the Winooski River. Land along the Winooski River is mostly in industrial, commercial, and agricultural use. The main streams and their watershed areas are shown on the attached map.

Wetlands protected under the State Wetlands Rules (those on the National Wetland Inventory Maps) are shown on the attached map. It is possible that noteworthy wetlands may exist that are not shown on the NWI Maps.

Little is known about the quality of the groundwater in Middlesex. Some wells in the village on Route 2 are known to be contaminated from a petroleum leak. On an attached map, known hazardous waste sites are shown, as well as groundwater yields throughout town; areas of generally low yields are shaded.

Plants and Animals

A great diversity of wildlife species makes their home in Middlesex or travels through it, providing residents with ample opportunities to view wildlife. The species range from song birds and small mammals such as red squirrels and raccoons to large mammals such as deer, bear and moose. Among the important habitats in town are a great blue heron nesting site and marshy areas in the northern end of Wrightsville Reservoir that are home to a healthy population of beaver and other animal and bird life. Three main deer wintering areas in Middlesex have been identified by the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Natural Heritage Program of the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife lists three sites in Middlesex that are known locations of rare plants or plant communities. Detailed information about these sites is available from this agency.

Goals, Objectives, & Implementation Strategies

Natural Resource Goals:

1. To protect important natural resource features and avoid fragmenting habitat.
2. To recognize the carrying capacity of our natural resources and accommodate development that does not jeopardize these resources' carrying capacity.
3. Streams, rivers, and ponds should provide safe, healthful conditions for water-based plant, animals, and humans.

Objective 1: To encourage and support farming, forestry and other natural resource based occupations.

Implementation Strategies:

- Gather information from available sources on forest and agricultural lands, including their current and potential use, that are important to land-based occupations in Middlesex.
- Evaluate and explore opportunities (tax-breaks, purchase of conservation easements, etc.) to help landowners keep their lands open for forest and agricultural uses in Middlesex. Educate Middlesex residents about the current use program and encourage more eligible landowners to participate.

Policy:

- Development should be planned and carried out to ensure the continued use of forests and fields. Development should occur so that the forests of Middlesex, especially in the Town's mountainous regions, do not become fragmented and inaccessible. Owners of fields and other areas in Middlesex containing agricultural soils, especially those suitable for crop production, should be encouraged to keep their land available for that purpose.

Objective 2: To protect the natural quality of streams, rivers, ponds, and wetlands.

Implementation Strategies:

- Gather information about possible pollution to streams and stream corridors and forward that information to appropriate officials and boards.
- Continue to address erosion hazards along Great Brook as recommended in the Agency of Natural Resources' Great Brook Study.
- Develop Town road and public property maintenance procedures in such a way as to conserve and protect natural resources
- Encourage the preservation of adequate vegetated buffers along streams and wetlands.

Objective 3: To protect and maintain the publicly and privately owned natural resources of Middlesex in order to enhance the visual and recreational opportunities of those living and passing through and avoid fragmentation of habitat.

Implementation Strategies:

- Coordinate with natural resource agencies, organizations and outdoor recreation planners to develop conservation plans for publicly-owned lands in Middlesex to meet the goals of this plan.

Policy:

- The tradition of accessible land should be encouraged by respecting private property and working with landowners so that members of the community can share the natural resources for hunting, hiking, and other recreation.